

HEALTH
SPECIAL

— Time to Talk —

SAFE MEDICATIONS

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IN THIS SPECIAL EDITION, THE SISTERS DEMYSTIFY WHICH REMEDIES YOU CAN AND CAN'T USE DURING PREGNANCY

While a lot of women are health conscious even before they become pregnant, this consciousness often reaches obsessional levels when expecting. Myths abound; they predate the internet like vermin. If you look hard enough you'll probably find someone, somewhere, saying that anything is either harmful or safe. Remember though, the internet is not regulated, so it's worth getting important information like this from a trusted source.

When it comes to medication, doctors are generally reluctant to give anything to pregnant women, particularly in the first trimester and, if you read the small print on any medication or supplements, the advice is to always consult your doctor if you are pregnant or breastfeeding. The reason for this is simple; it is unethical to test drugs on pregnant or breastfeeding women and so while, in many cases, they probably won't be harmful, the evidence base is not there, so decisions are made on a case by case basis. Doctors therefore make the assessment according to the risk and benefit. For example, if a mother has an infection which needs to be treated with antibiotics, the doctors will ask, is the baby more at risk from the antibiotics or the mother's infection? Very often the small risk from the medicine is less than not treating something potentially serious in the mother.

But at a time when you're driven crazy by hormones, the minefield of which medicines are safe to take is enough to drive you mad. As a general rule, avoid taking medicines that are not strictly necessary, during the whole pregnancy but particularly in the first trimester when most of baby's development is taking place. In the meantime, here's a list of what's safe and what's not.

PAIN RELIEF

Paracetamol is the safest painkiller to take in pregnancy. Ibuprofen and high-dose aspirin have both been linked to complications, especially later on in pregnancy, so the advice is to stay away from these.

NAUSEA

Nausea in pregnancy is mostly mild and ridden out without the need for drugs. Ginger is a

natural antiemetic, so drinking ginger tea or eating ginger biscuits sometimes helps. Eating little and often tends to keep sickness at bay and, surprisingly, exercise has been shown to reduce the feeling of nausea – even if it's the last thing that you feel like doing. Anecdotal, women report acupuncture and reflexology as being helpful. When women get an extreme form of nausea, called hyperemesis gravidarum, they are so sick, they cannot keep anything down and risk getting dehydrated. This is a typical case of risk versus benefit where the risks of antiemetic drugs in the pregnancy are considered less than the effects of dehydration.

HAY FEVER

Broadly speaking, the nasal sprays and eye drops that contain sodium cromoglicate, antihistamines and corticosteroids are considered the safest first line of treatment when pregnant. If you feel you need to take oral antihistamines, you should speak to your

relief' which may contain other drugs as well. Raising your pillow while you're bunged up helps, as does a room humidifier.

COUGHS

Over-the-counter cough medicines are not advised and are not that helpful, in any case. If you are feeling unwell with a cough it is important that a doctor listens to your chest to make sure you are not brewing an infection. Night-time coughs can be helped by keeping the air moist with a humidifier.

ECZEMA / ITCHY SKIN RASH

Eczema often gets worse during pregnancy and using plenty of emollient cream can help to prevent it. Topical corticosteroids are considered safe if the benefit outweighs the risk – it's likely that baby will be more affected if the mother is stressed and unable to sleep because of the itchiness, than by the effects of the cream.

THRUSH

Thrush is also a common problem during pregnancy and best cleared up as soon as possible. The thrush cream clotrimazole is generally considered safe to use, either in cream or pessary form. If this

doesn't work speak to your doctor about taking the one-off oral tablet fluconazole.

ANAESTHETIC

Anaesthetics are not considered safe in pregnancy and if an operation is avoidable, it's postponed. An epidural is the safest. This is why pregnant women are advised against any risky sports such as riding and skiing. In the first trimester it's unlikely that a fall would affect your pregnancy, but if you get injured and doctors need to administer drugs or anaesthetic, then the risk is from those drugs. For more, BUMPS (medicinesinpregnancy.org) is a good online source that compares all the evidence, and of course, always speak to your doctor if you're worried. **U**

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AVOID MEDICINES THAT ARE NOT NECESSARY, PARTICULARLY IN THE FIRST TRIMESTER

doctor. Generally the ones that make you drowsy have been studied in pregnancy more than others, and are considered safer. Oral or topical decongestants should be avoided. Otherwise, applying a balm to your nostrils is a good way of preventing pollen getting into your nose and poses no risk to your baby.

HEARTBURN

Heartburn can be helped by over-the-counter brands such as Rennie and Gaviscon, and these are safe. Lots of women with bad reflux say constantly sipping the liquid Gaviscon works best. Some foods will irritate heartburn – typically acidic foods, but it often varies from woman to woman so keep a note of what you're eating to see what exacerbates your symptoms, and try to eat little and often.

COLDS

Annoyingly, taking a decongestant is not safe in pregnancy. Paracetamol does help but make sure it is just paracetamol rather than a 'flu



Time to Talk... SLEEP IN PREGNANCY

MARINA FOGLE & DR CHIARA HUNT

The sisters offer their advice on how to sleep well when you're expecting

We are constantly being told how important sleep is in pregnancy. After all, pregnancy takes its toll on your body and it's believed that your baby grows most while you're sleeping. Considering this, it feels incredibly unjust that so many of us find sleeping a real challenge. However, the good news is that there are some really effective, simple things you can try to help break the cycle of insomnia and enable you to get the good night's sleep you need.

Avoid caffeine and sugar for six hours before bed. Coffee and chocolate are the worst offenders but also be aware that green tea contains caffeine and some fruits contain a surprisingly high amount of sugar.

Don't eat heavily just before bed. Try to keep your evening meal light and if necessary, have a snack before bed. Going to bed

on an empty stomach can be as counterproductive as going to bed on a very full stomach.

Drink less after 6pm. Even from the beginning of pregnancy, frequent trips to the toilet can interrupt sleep. Drink plenty during the day but cut down later on to avoid waking in the night.

Don't nap after 3pm. Having a sleep during the day is crucial if you're tired, but avoid a catnap on the sofa in the afternoon; even a 10-minute doze can stop you going to sleep properly.

Put the laptop away. Make your bedroom a smartphone- and computer-free zone. Not only will this be beneficial to your relationship, but evidence shows that using these devices at night has a negative impact on sleep.

Exercise promotes good sleep. Try to include this in your day,

although not too close to bedtime as the endorphins can interfere with good sleep. People also snooze better if they've been exposed to fresh air and natural light during the day, so outdoor exercise is the most beneficial.

Develop a bedtime routine. A routine will subconsciously prepare the body for sleep. Avoid doing anything stimulating – instead, have a bath, turn down the lights or do some reading. Best of all, have sex; post-coital sleeps are often the best. Going to bed and getting up at the same time, even on weekends, will create a routine, too.

Reserve your bedroom for sleep and sex. If you're used to working, sorting or using your phone in bed, it will become a less restful environment. Also ensure your room is the right temperature (many people sleep better in cooler environments)

with plenty of fresh air being let in, and if you find you're being woken by light or noise, use ear plugs and an eye mask.

Try breathing exercises. If you choose to use hypnotherapy as part of your birth preparation, the relaxation techniques can also help you sleep. We love Maggie Howell's *Easy to Sleep*, (natalhypnotherapy.co.uk). We're so focused on doing the best we can for our babies while pregnant that insomnia often leads to stress. This in itself will preclude sleep. We all need different levels of sleep, so judge on how you feel rather than the amount of hours you think you've had. **U**

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