Atopic Dermatitis

This sheet is about having atopic dermatitis in a pregnancy or while breastfeeding. This information is based on published research studies. It should not take the place of medical care and advice from your healthcare provider.

What is atopic dermatitis?

Atopic dermatitis (also called atopic eczema or eczema) is a medical condition that makes skin red and itchy. Symptoms can include dry and itchy skin, red to brownish-gray patches (especially on the hands, feet, ankles, wrists, neck, upper chest, eyelids, inside the bend of the elbows and knees), small, raised bumps that might leak fluid and crust over when scratched, thickened, cracked, or scaly skin, and/or raw/sensitive skin from scratching.

Atopic dermatitis can be mild, moderate, or severe. For most people, atopic dermatitis starts in childhood, but it can also start in adulthood. For some people, atopic dermatitis is a chronic disorder with symptoms that can be ongoing for a period and then symptoms go away but come back on and off (flares).

I have atopic dermatitis. Can it make it harder for me to get pregnant?

It is not known if atopic dermatitis can make it harder to get pregnant. One study suggests that atopic dermatitis might make it harder to get pregnant.

Does having atopic dermatitis increase the chance of miscarriage?

Miscarriage is common and can occur in any pregnancy for many different reasons. Studies have not been done to see if atopic dermatitis can increase the chance of miscarriage.

Does having atopic dermatitis increase the chance of birth defects?

Birth defects can happen in any pregnancy for different reasons. Out of all babies born each year, about 3 out of 100 (3%) will have a birth defect. We look at research studies to try to understand if atopic dermatitis might increase the chance of birth defects in a pregnancy. It is not known if atopic dermatitis can increase the chance of birth defects.

Does having atopic dermatitis increase the chance of other pregnancy-related problems?

It is not known if atopic dermatitis can increase the chance of pregnancy-related problems, such as preterm delivery (birth before week 37) or low birth weight (weighing less than 5 pounds, 8 ounces [2500 grams] at birth). There have been reports of atopic dermatitis symptoms becoming worse or flaring during the 2nd or 3rd trimester of their pregnancy.

One study suggests that having atopic dermatitis can increase the chance of high blood pressure in people who are not pregnant. High blood pressure can increase the risks to a pregnancy. If you have questions or concerns about your blood pressure, talk with your healthcare provider.

Does having atopic dermatitis in pregnancy affect future behavior or learning for the child?

Studies have not been done to see if having atopic dermatitis can increase the chance of behavior or learning issues for the child.

Can I take my prescribed medication for atopic dermatitis during pregnancy?

It is important that you talk with your healthcare providers about your medication when planning pregnancy, or as soon as you learn that you are pregnant. Sometimes when people find out they are pregnant, they think about changing how they take their medication or stopping their medication altogether. However, it is important to talk with your healthcare providers before making any changes to how you take your medication. Your healthcare providers can talk with you about the benefits of treating your condition and the risks of untreated illness during pregnancy. There are a variety of medications that are used to treat atopic dermatitis. Information on specific medications can be found in our fact sheets at https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/ or by contacting a MotherToBaby specialist at 866.626.6847.

Breastfeeding while having atopic dermatitis:

Atopic dermatitis does not appear to affect a person's ability to breastfeed. Talk with your healthcare provider and your baby's pediatrician about any medications you take for atopic dermatitis while breastfeeding. Information on specific medications can be found in our fact sheets at https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/ or by contacting a MotherToBaby specialist at 866.626.6847. Be sure to talk with your healthcare provider about all your breastfeeding questions.

If a man has atopic dermatitis, could it affect fertility or increase the chance of birth defects?

One study suggests that men with atopic dermatitis could have more trouble with fertility (ability to get a partner pregnant) then men without the condition. Studies have not been done to see if atopic dermatitis could increase the chance of birth defects. In general, exposures that fathers or sperm donors have are unlikely to increase risks to a pregnancy. For more information, please see the MotherToBaby fact sheet Paternal Exposures at https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/paternal-exposures-pregnancy/.

MotherToBaby is currently conducting a study looking at eczema (moderate-to-severe)/atopic dermatitis in pregnancy. If you are interested in taking part in this study, please call 1-877-311-8972 or sign up at https://mothertobaby.org/join-study/.

Please click here for references.

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