Benzocaine

This sheet is about exposure to benzocaine in pregnancy and 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 benzocaine?

Benzocaine is a topical local anesthetic. Local anesthetics are used to numb specific areas of the body for short periods of time. Benzocaine can be found in some over the counter pain relieving products, including Anbesol®, Orabase®, Orajel®, Hurricaine®, and Topex®.

Are topical medications absorbed through the skin?

In general, the skin serves as a good barrier, so only a small amount of the medication is likely to be absorbed with topical exposure. More of the active ingredients can be absorbed into the person's blood stream if the skin is broken or irritated and when it is used over a large area of the skin. The more times the medication is applied on the skin, more can be absorbed. The amount of the medication that can reach the developing fetus by absorption through the skin is usually much lower than with medications taken by mouth.

Benzocaine has not been well-studied for use in pregnancy. When used as directed, very little benzocaine is expected to be absorbed. That means it is unlikely that a significant amount would reach the developing fetus, and that the chance of birth defects or other pregnancy complications is expected to be low.

I use benzocaine. Can it make it harder for me to get pregnant?

It is not known if benzocaine use can make it harder to get pregnant.

Does using benzocaine 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 benzocaine can increase the chance of miscarriage.

Does using benzocaine 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 an exposure, like benzocaine, might increase the chance of birth defects in a pregnancy. Two reports did not find a greater chance of birth defects in children of women who reported using benzocaine in the first trimester of pregnancy.

Does using benzocaine in pregnancy increase the chance of other pregnancy-related problems?

Studies have not been done to see if benzocaine 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).

Does using benzocaine in pregnancy affect future behavior or learning for the child?

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

Breastfeeding while using benzocaine:

Benzocaine has not been well studied for use during breastfeeding. It is not recommended to apply benzocaine to the breasts or nipples because of the risk for a serious blood disorder if the baby ingests it. However, if benzocaine is not applied to these areas and the baby does not get it in their mouth, then topical benzocaine use is unlikely to affect a baby who is breastfed. Wash hands well after using benzocaine. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about all your breastfeeding questions.

If a man takes benzocaine, could it affect fertility or increase the chance of birth defects?

Studies have not been done to see if benzocaine could affect a man's fertility (ability to get a partner pregnant) or increase the chance of birth defects. In general, exposures that men 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/.

Please click here for references.

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