Capsaicin

This sheet is about exposure to capsaicin 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 providers.

What is capsaicin?

Capsaicin is the part of peppers (Solanaceae family, *capsicum* genus) that makes your mouth feel hot. Capsaicin has been generally recognized as safe (GRAS) by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for use in food and candy. It has been used in some cosmetics, to treat nausea/vomiting, and is the main ingredient in pepper spray used for defense.

Capsaicin has been used in topical (applied to the skin) form to treat pain. Some brand names for topical preparations include Capazasin®, Qutenza®, and Zostrix®. It has also been given as an injection in the foot to help treat pain from Morton's neuroma (a nerve condition of the foot).

Capsaicin has been sold in oral forms (such as pills and capsules) as an herbal supplement. The use of herbal products is generally not recommended during pregnancy unless under the direction and care of your healthcare provider to treat a medical condition. For more information about herbal products, please see our fact sheet at https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/herbal-products-pregnancy/.

I take capsaicin. Can it make it harder for me to get pregnant?

Studies have not been done in humans to see if using capsaicin can make it harder to get pregnant. Animal studies did not report that capsaicin affected female fertility (ability to get pregnant).

Does taking capsaicin 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 capsaicin can increase the chance of miscarriage.

Does taking capsaicin 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 capsaicin, might increase the chance of birth defects in a pregnancy. Studies have not been done in humans to see if capsaicin can increase the chance of birth defects. Animal studies do not suggest that capsaicin increases the chance of birth defects. One case reported that the use of a capsaicin patch by a woman during pregnancy with no health problems in the one-year-old baby.

Does taking capsaicin in pregnancy increase the chance of other pregnancy-related problems?

Studies have not been done in humans to see if capsaicin 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). One animal study suggested that capsaicin might affect growth of the developing fetus.

Does taking capsaicin in pregnancy affect future behavior or learning for the child?

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

Breastfeeding while taking capsaicin:

Capsaicin has not been studied for use while breastfeeding. There is a report of two breastfed infants who developed skin rashes when they nursed 12 and 15 hours after the woman who was breastfeeding ate foods that were flavored with red pepper. The skin reactions in the nursing infants slowly went away over several days. If you suspect the baby has any symptoms (such as a rash), contact the child's healthcare provider. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about all your breastfeeding questions.

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

Studies have not been done in humans to see if capsaicin could affect a man's fertility (ability to make healthy sperm) or increase the chance of birth defects. Animal studies do not suggest that capsaicin could affect male fertility. 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.

Questions? Call 866.626.6847 | Text 855.999.3525 | Email or Chat at MotherToBaby.org.

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