Cetirizine (Zyrtec®)

This sheet is about exposure to cetirizine in pregnancy and while breastfeeding. This information is based on available published literature. It should not take the place of medical care and advice from your healthcare provider.

What is cetirizine?

Cetirizine is an antihistamine. Antihistamines are medications that have been used to treat symptoms of allergies, like sneezing, itching, runny nose, and watery eyes. Cetirizine is sold over the counter under brand names including Zyrtec® and Reactine®.

Sometimes when women 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.

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

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

Does taking cetirizine increase the chance of miscarriage?

Miscarriage is common and can occur in any pregnancy for many different reasons. Several small studies done on the use of cetirizine during pregnancy did not find a higher chance of miscarriage.

Does taking cetirizine 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 cetirizine, might increase the chance of birth defects in a pregnancy. Studies involving over 1,300 pregnancies exposed to cetirizine did not show an increased chance of birth defects.

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

Studies on a small number of pregnancies did not find a higher 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 taking cetirizine in pregnancy affect future behavior or learning for the child?

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

Breastfeeding while taking cetirizine:

Cetirizine gets into breast milk in small amounts. Most reports show no problems for babies who are exposed to cetirizine through breast milk. Compared to some other antihistamines, cetirizine is thought to have a lower chance of causing drowsiness for the breastfeeding woman and the nursing baby. For this reason, cetirizine may be preferred for breastfeeding over other antihistamines that cause sleepiness. With repeated use, babies can be checked for signs of being too sleepy (hard to wake up). If you suspect the baby has any symptoms, contact the child's healthcare provider.

It has been suggested that use of an antihistamine might lower the amount of breast milk made by a woman's body, but this has not been proven.

A product label for cetirizine recommends breastfeeding women not use this medication. But the benefit of using cetirizine might outweigh possible risks. Your healthcare providers can talk with you about using cetirizine and what treatment is best for you. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about all your breastfeeding questions.

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

One report suggested that long-term use of antihistamines like cetirizine might lower sperm counts. Low sperm counts might lower a man's fertility (ability to get a woman pregnant). 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/.

Please click here for references.

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