Cetirizine

This sheet talks about exposure to cetirizine in a pregnancy and while breastfeeding. This information should not take the place of medical care and advice from your healthcare provider.

What is cetirizine?

Cetirizine is an antihistamine. Antihistamines are medications used for allergies and cold symptoms. Cetirizine can be used to treat allergy symptoms, including sneezing, runny nose, watery eyes and itchy throat. Cetirizine is sold over the counter under brand names including Zyrtec® and Reactine®. Xyzal® is a prescription medicine that contains the active ingredient of cetirizine called levocetirizine. The similarities between cetirizine and levocetirizine suggest the pregnancy findings should be similar for both.

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

Studies have not been done to see if cetirizine could make it harder for a woman to get pregnant.

I just found out I am pregnant. Should I stop taking cetirizine?

Talk with your healthcare provider before making any changes in this medication. It is important to weigh the benefits of treating allergy symptoms during pregnancy. In women with asthma, treating allergy symptoms may decrease asthma symptoms and the need for extra asthma medicines. Allergy treatment can also lead to better sleep and emotional well-being.

Does taking cetirizine increase the chance for miscarriage?

Miscarriage can occur in any pregnancy. Studies on a small number of pregnancies did not find a higher chance for miscarriage.

Does taking cetirizine in the first trimester increase the chance of birth defects?

In every pregnancy, a woman starts out with a 3-5% chance of having a baby with a birth defect. This is called her background risk. Studies involving over 1,300 babies born to mothers who took cetirizine in the first trimester did not show an increased chance of birth defects.

Could taking cetirizine in the second or third trimester cause other pregnancy complications?

Cetirizine is unlikely to cause other pregnancy complications. Studies on a small number of pregnancies did not find a higher chance for birth defects, preterm delivery (having the baby before 37 weeks), or low birth weight.

Does taking cetirizine in pregnancy cause long-term problems in behavior or learning for the baby?

Studies on cetirizine have not been done to learn if there could be long-term effects from use in a pregnancy.

Can I breastfeed while taking cetirizine?
There are no studies that look at cetirizine use during breastfeeding. Although it has been suggested that antihistamines might reduce the amount of breast milk a woman makes, there have been no studies showing that this has actually happened. Compared to some other antihistamines, cetirizine has less chance of causing drowsiness for the mother or the baby. For this reason, cetirizine may be preferred for breastfeeding over antihistamines that do cause sleepiness. With repeated use, babies should be checked for signs that they are not overly drowsy. If you suspect that the baby has symptoms (like drowsiness), contact the child’s healthcare provider. Be sure to talk to your health care provider about all your breastfeeding questions.

**If a man takes cetirizine, could it affect his fertility (ability to get partner pregnant) or increase the chance of birth defects?**

There are no studies looking at possible problems with risks to a pregnancy when the father takes cetirizine. In general, exposures that fathers have are unlikely to increase risks to a pregnancy. For more information, please see the MotherToBaby fact sheet on Paternal Exposures at: https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/paternal-exposures-pregnancy/pdf/.

Please click here for references.