



MotherToBaby

Medications & More During Pregnancy & Breastfeeding
Ask The Experts

Fact Sheet

by the **Organization of Teratology Information Specialists (OTIS)**

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Cetirizine

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. This sheet talks about whether exposure to cetirizine may increase the risk for birth defects over that background risk. This information should not take the place of medical care and advice from your health care provider.

What is cetirizine?

Cetirizine is an antihistamine. Antihistamines are medicines 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 the 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 just found out I am pregnant. Should I stop taking cetirizine?

You should always speak with your health care provider before making any changes in your 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.

In a healthy adult, it usually takes about two days for almost all of the cetirizine to leave the body.

Can taking cetirizine during my pregnancy cause birth defects?

It is unlikely. 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.

Can taking cetirizine cause other pregnancy problems?

Cetirizine is not expected to cause other pregnancy problems. Studies on a small number of pregnancies showed no increase in miscarriage, premature delivery (having the baby before 37 weeks), or low birth weight.

Can I take cetirizine while breastfeeding?

Probably. There are no studies that look at cetirizine specifically during breastfeeding. Although it has been suggested that antihistamines might reduce the amount of 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. Be sure to talk to your health care provider about all of your breastfeeding questions.

What if the father of the baby takes cetirizine?

There are no studies looking at possible problems with risks to a pregnancy when the father takes cetirizine. One report involving one man suggested that exposure to cetirizine may be associated with decreased sperm movement, but more studies need to be done to confirm this finding. 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/>.

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