Dextromethorphan

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

What is dextromethorphan?

Dextromethorphan is a medication that has been used in over-the-counter products to treat cough (cough suppressant). It comes in pill, liquid, and cough drop forms. It is also available in combination with other medications in over-the-counter multi-symptom cold, cough, and flu products.

Some over-the-counter liquid products that contain dextromethorphan contain alcohol, so it is important to review all the ingredients on the label before using. Products that contain alcohol are not recommended in pregnancy.

This sheet will focus on over-the-counter use of dextromethorphan to treat cough. However, dextromethorphan is also available by prescription in combination with other medications. When dextromethorphan is used in combination with other prescription medications, it might work differently in the body than when it is used in over-the-counter products. Speak with your healthcare provider about using these prescription medications during pregnancy or while breastfeeding.

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 dextromethorphan. Can it make it harder for me to get pregnant?

Studies have not been done to see if taking dextromethorphan can make it harder to get pregnant.

Does taking dextromethorphan increase the chance for miscarriage?

Miscarriage is common and can occur in any pregnancy for many different reasons. A study looking at the pregnancies of 128 women who took dextromethorphan to treat cough in the first trimester did not report an increase in miscarriages.

Does taking dextromethorphan 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 dextromethorphan, might increase the chance of birth defects in a pregnancy. Taking dextromethorphan as directed to treat cough in pregnancy is not expected to increase the chance of birth defects.

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

A study looking at the pregnancies of 184 women who took dextromethorphan to treat cough at any time during pregnancy did not find an increased chance of stillbirth or low birthweight (weighing less than 5 pounds, 8 ounces [2500 grams] at birth). Studies have not been done to see if taking dextromethorphan for cough increases the chance of other pregnancy-related problems, such as preterm delivery (birth before week 37).

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

Studies have not been done to see if dextromethorphan can cause behavior or learning issues for the child.

Breastfeeding while taking dextromethorphan:

When used as directed to treat cough, dextromethorphan gets into breast milk in small amounts. Taking over-the-counter dextromethorphan as directed for a short time is not expected to cause problems for most breastfed infants. If

you suspect the baby has any symptoms (such as a rash or unusual sleepiness), contact the child's healthcare provider.

Some over-the-counter liquid products with dextromethorphan contain alcohol, so it is important to review all the ingredients on the label before using. Alcohol-free cough syrups are preferred while breastfeeding. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about all your breastfeeding questions.

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

Studies have not been done to see if dextromethorphan could affect male fertility (ability to make healthy sperm) or increase the chance of birth defects. In general, exposures in men are less likely to increase risks to a pregnancy. For more general information, please see the MotherToBaby fact sheet Paternal Exposures at https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/paternal-exposures-pregnancy/.

Please click here for references.

Disclaimer: MotherToBaby Fact Sheets are meant for general information purposes and should not replace the advice of your health care provider. MotherToBaby is a service of the non-profit Organization of Teratology Information Specialists (OTIS). Copyright by OTIS, July 1, 2026.