Docusate Sodium

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

What is docusate sodium?

Docusate sodium is the main ingredient in some stool softeners such as Colace® and Surfak® which are used to treat constipation. Constipation affects the number of bowel movements a person usually has, and can cause gas and bloating. Docusate sodium is also found in many drugs and cosmetics. It may also be found in multivitamins and in some prenatal vitamins. In general, docusate sodium is thought to stay in the gut with very little getting into the bloodstream. If the medication is not in the bloodstream, it does not cross the placenta and the fetus/baby would not be exposed.

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

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

I just found out I am pregnant. Should I stop taking docusate sodium?

If you were prescribed docusate sodium by your healthcare provider, talk with them before making any changes in how you take this medication. It is important to consider the benefits of treating constipation symptoms during pregnancy. Your healthcare provider may want to confirm a diagnosis of constipation and see how dietary and other lifestyle therapies may help.

Does taking docusate sodium during my pregnancy increase the chance of miscarriage?

Miscarriage can occur in any pregnancy. Docusate sodium has not been studied for a risk of miscarriage.

Does taking docusate sodium during 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. Few studies have been done to look at use of docusate sodium during pregnancy. However, the available studies show that when used in recommended doses docusate sodium is not expected to increase the chance of birth defects.

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

When used in recommended doses, docusate sodium is unlikely to cause problems during pregnancy. However, when more than the recommended amount of this product is used, it can lower the levels of magnesium in a person’s blood. There is one reported case of low magnesium levels in a newborn that was linked to the mother overusing docusate sodium. The baby’s main symptom was jitteriness, which went away by the second day of life. There have been no reported problems linked to the use of recommended levels of docusate sodium in pregnancy.

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

There are no studies looking at possible long-term problems in behavior or learning for the baby while docusate sodium is used during pregnancy.

Can I breastfeed while taking docusate sodium?

Docusate sodium use while breastfeeding has not been studied. While some of the docusate sodium is absorbed by the mother, the amount that passes into milk is likely low. There have been no reports of problems in children that are breastfeeding while the mother is taking docusate sodium. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about all of your breastfeeding questions.

If a man takes docusate sodium, 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 conceiving or risks to a pregnancy when the father takes docusate sodium. In general, exposures that fathers 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/pdf/.

MotherToBaby is currently conducting a study looking at functional constipation and the medications used to treat it in pregnancy. If you are interested in learning more about this study, please call 1-877-311-8972 or visit https://mothertobaby.org/join-study.

Please click here for references.