Docusate Sodium

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

What is docusate sodium?

Docusate sodium is a stool softener that has been used to treat constipation (when a person passes less than three bowel movements a week or has trouble with bowel movements). Docusate sodium is found in many products and has been sold under many different brand names. Some brand names are Colace®, Correctol®, Docusate®, Surfak®, and Soflax®.

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

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

Does taking docusate sodium increase the chance of miscarriage?

Miscarriage is common and can occur in any pregnancy for many different reasons. Studies have not been done to see if docusate sodium increases the chance for miscarriage. In general, very little docusate sodium is expected to get into the blood stream; which makes it unlikely it would reach the developing pregnancy.

Does taking docusate sodium 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 docusate sodium, might increase the chance of birth defects in a pregnancy. When used as directed, docusate sodium is unlikely to increase the chance of birth defects above the background risk.

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

When used in recommended doses, docusate sodium is unlikely to cause problems during pregnancy, such as preterm delivery (birth before week 37) or low birth weight (weighing less than 5 pounds, 8 ounces [2500 grams] at birth).

Using more than the recommended amount of docusate sodium 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 overuse of docusate sodium by the woman who was pregnant. The baby's main symptom was jitteriness, which went away by age 2 days. There have been no reported problems linked to the use of recommended amounts of docusate sodium in pregnancy.

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

Studies have not been done to see if prenatal exposure to docusate sodium could cause behavior or learning issues for the child.

Breastfeeding while taking docusate sodium:

The use of docusate sodium while breastfeeding has not been studied. Docusate sodium is not well-absorbed from the gastrointestinal tract and is unlikely to be found in breastmilk in large amounts. There was 1 case report of diarrhea in an infant who was exposed to docusate sodium along with another medication called danthron through breastmilk. There have been no other reports of problems in children exposed to docusate sodium during breastfeeding. If you suspect the baby has any symptoms (such as diarrhea), contact the child's healthcare provider. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about all your breastfeeding questions.

If a man takes docusate sodium, could it affect fertility (ability to get a woman pregnant) or increase the chance of birth defects?

Studies have not been done to see if docusate sodium could affect male fertility or increase the chance of birth defects above the background risk. In general, exposures that men 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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