Echinacea

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

What is echinacea?

Echinacea is an herb that comes from the roots, stem, leaves, and flower of the plant ***Echinacea purpurea*** (purple coneflower). Dried roots of ***Echinacea angustifolia*** and ***Echinacea pallida*** are also used. The type of active ingredients among different products can vary widely. The active ingredients and strength of the active ingredients depends on the type of echinacea plant used, the part of the plant used, and how it is made.

Echinacea comes in many forms, such as teas, extracts, capsules, tablets, tinctures, and preparations that go on the skin (topical). Some dietary supplements can contain echinacea.

Herbal products do not need to show that they are safe or effective before they are sold to the public. The ingredients and dose on the label may be different from what is in the product. Many herbs and herbal products have not been studied, or well-studied, for use in human pregnancy. Herbal products may contain harmful substances (called contaminants) such as metals, pesticides, chemicals, or microorganisms. These contaminants may have their own negative effects on a pregnancy.

The use of herbal products is generally not recommended during pregnancy unless under the direction and care of your healthcare provider to treat a medical condition. For more information on herbal products in general, please see our fact sheet at: https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/herbal-products-pregnancy/.

Tinctures can contain the extract of a plant (such as echinacea) dissolved in alcohol. These preparations could have a significant amount of alcohol. Alcohol should be avoided during pregnancy and breastfeeding. More information about alcohol can be found in our fact sheet here https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/alcohol-pregnancy/.

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

Studies have not been done to see if taking echinacea could make it harder to get pregnant.

Does taking echinacea increase the chance of miscarriage?

Miscarriage is common and can occur in any pregnancy for many different reasons. Animal studies suggest that echinacea products might increase the chance of miscarriage. However, it is not clear how the echinacea preparations and dose levels used in the animal studies compare to what would be used by humans. One small study in humans found no increased chance of miscarriage in those who took echinacea when compared to those who did not.

Does taking echinacea 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 echinacea, might increase the chance of birth defects in a pregnancy. Small studies looking at exposure to echinacea during pregnancy have not reported an increased chance of birth defects above the background risk.

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

In a study comparing over 350 pregnancies exposed to echinacea and over 68,000 unexposed pregnancies, no increased chance of preterm delivery (birth before week 37), low birth weight (weighing less than 5 pounds, 8 ounces [2500 grams] at birth), or small for gestational age infants was reported.

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

Studies have not been done to see if echinacea can increase the chance of behavior or learning issues for the child.

Some echinacea preparations have been found to be contaminated by heavy metals like lead. High blood lead levels

during pregnancy can harm fetal development. More information on lead can be found in our factsheet here https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/lead-pregnancy/,

Breastfeeding while taking echinacea:

Information on the use of echinacea while breastfeeding is limited. One study found some components of echinacea in breast milk after a breastfeeding mother took echinacea tablets. It is not known if or how these components would affect a nursing child. If you suspect the baby has any symptoms (stomach upset, diarrhea, constipation, skin rash, or allergic reactions), contact the child's healthcare provider. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about all your breastfeeding questions.

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

Studies have not been done in humans to see if taking echinacea could affect male fertility (ability to get a wonan pregnant) or increase the chance of birth defects. In general, exposures that fathers or sperm donors have are unlikely to increase the 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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