Fenoprofen

This sheet is about exposure to fenoprofen 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 provider.

What is fenoprofen?

Fenoprofen is a medication that has been used to treat pain and inflammation in conditions such as osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis (RA). It belongs to the class of medications called non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). Some brand names for fenoprofen are Fenopron®, Fenortho®, and Nalfon®.

MotherToBaby has a fact sheet on rheumatoid arthritis here: https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/rheumatoid-arthritis/.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommend not using NSAIDs after week 20 of pregnancy unless your healthcare provider specifically recommends it. If a healthcare provider decides NSAIDs are needed after week 20 of pregnancy, they should be used at the lowest dose for the shortest time.

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

Some studies suggest that using fenoprofen or other NSAIDs might make it harder to get pregnant. This might be more likely when NSAIDs are used often or over a long period of time.

Does taking fenoprofen increase the chance of miscarriage?

Miscarriage is common and can occur in any pregnancy for many different reasons. Some studies have found a higher chance of miscarriage among women who used NSAIDs (including fenoprofen) during pregnancy, while other studies have not. It is hard to know whether any increased risk is due to the medication itself, the medical condition being treated, or other factors.

Does taking fenoprofen 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 fenoprofen, might increase the chance of birth defects in a pregnancy.

A small increased chance of heart defects has been reported in a few studies looking at NSAID prescriptions in early pregnancy. However, the reason the NSAID was prescribed was not available in most of the reported data. Studies based on prescription records cannot tell if a person took the medication. This makes it hard to know if the study outcomes are related to medication or other factors. Other studies looking at NSAID use have not found a risk for birth defects.

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

There are some studies that suggest NSAIDs can increase the chance of other pregnancy-related problems, such as preterm delivery (birth before week 37) or low birth weight (weighing less than 5 pounds, 8 ounces [2500 grams] at birth. Other studies have not reported these findings.

Fenoprofen is usually not recommended after week 20 of pregnancy. Some reports suggest that using NSAIDs in the second half of pregnancy might affect the fetal kidneys and lower the amount of amniotic fluid (the fluid around the fetus in the womb). One study also suggested that NSAID use earlier in pregnancy might have similar effects. Too little amniotic fluid (called oligohydramnios) can lead to problems like poor lung development, stiff joints, or the need for early delivery by induction or C-section. In rare cases, oligohydramnios could cause fetal death before birth.

Using fenoprofen later in pregnancy might cause the ductus arteriosus (an opening between the two major blood vessels leading from the heart) to close early. If the ductus arteriosus closes before it should, it can cause high blood pressure in the fetal lungs (pulmonary hypertension).

Fenoprofen should only be used under a healthcare provider's supervision, particularly in the 2nd and 3rd trimesters. Your healthcare providers can closely monitor your pregnancy if you need to use fenoprofen after week 20 of pregnancy.

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

It is not known if fenoprofen can increase the chance of behavior or learning issues for the child.

What screenings or tests are available to see if my pregnancy has birth defects or other issues?

Prenatal ultrasounds can be used to screen for some pregnancy-related problems, such as oligohydramnios and fetal kidney function. Fetal echocardiograms (an ultrasound of the fetal heart) can be used to identify premature closure of the ductus arteriosus. Ultrasound can also be used to monitor the growth of the fetus. Talk with your healthcare provider about any prenatal screenings or testing that are available to you. There are no tests available during pregnancy that can tell how much effect there could be on future behavior or learning.

Breastfeeding while taking fenoprofen:

Fenoprofen passes into breast milk in small amounts. There is no information on potential side effects in children exposed to fenoprofen through breast milk. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about all your breastfeeding questions.

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

It is not known if fenoprofen could affect men's fertility (ability to make healthy sperm). Studies have not been done to see if fenoprofen could increase the chance of birth defects. In general, exposures that fathers or sperm donors 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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