Finasteride

This sheet is about exposure to finasteride 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 finasteride?

Finasteride is a medication that has been used to treat male pattern hair loss and benign prostatic hyperplasia (enlarged prostate). Oral finasteride (a pill taken by mouth) has been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for use in men. Finasteride is not approved for use in women but has been used "off label" in women to treat hair loss and hirsutism (extra hair growth on areas of the body such as the face, chest, and back). Some brand names for finasteride are Propecia® and Proscar®.

Topical finasteride (used on the skin) has not been approved by the FDA but has been used to treat male and female pattern hair loss. This fact sheet will focus on the use of oral finasteride. The product label for finasteride recommends women not use this medication during pregnancy/breastfeeding. Finasteride, in any form, is not recommended for use during pregnancy. If you are taking this medication and find out you are pregnant, talk with your healthcare provider.

I am taking finasteride, but I would like to stop taking it before getting pregnant. How long does the drug stay in my body?

The time it takes the body to metabolize (to process) medication is not the same for everyone. In healthy non-pregnant adults, it takes up to 2 days, on average, for most of the finasteride to be gone from the body.

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

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

Does taking finasteride 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 taking finasteride could increase the chance of miscarriage.

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

Animal studies have suggested that exposure to large doses of finasteride when the fetal sex organs are developing (8 to 12 weeks of pregnancy) could increase the chance of some birth defects of the sex organs in a male fetus. Animal studies have reported hypospadias (when the opening of the penis is on the underside of the penis instead of at the tip), a shorter distance from the anus to the genitals (anogenital distance), and lower weight of the prostate and seminal vesicles (glands that help make semen).

If I touch or handle finasteride tablets during pregnancy, is there an increased risk to my pregnancy?

Pregnant women are told not to handle finasteride tablets that are crushed or broken as a precaution. The coating on uncrushed or unbroken tablets should prevent contact with finasteride during typical handling. If you touch or handle crushed or broken finasteride tablets, wash your hands. It is unlikely that enough of the medication would get through the skin and increase risks to a pregnancy.

People who are required to work with finasteride as part of their job should wear gloves, clean surface areas where pills are handled, and wash their hands. Workers should discuss proper handling and storage with their occupational safety officers. For more information about workplace exposures, see the MotherToBaby fact sheet here: https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/reproductive-hazards-workplace/.

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

Studies have not been done in humans to see if finasteride can increase the chance of pregnancy-related problems such as preterm delivery (birth before 37 weeks of pregnancy) or low birth weight (weighing less than 5 pounds, 8 ounces [2500 grams] at birth).

Animal studies suggest that finasteride exposure in pregnancy might increase the chance of preterm delivery and might affect the movement of the testicles into the proper position in the scrotum (the bag of skin hanging below the penis). This process is called testicular descent and usually happens on its own in most males soon after birth.

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

Studies have not been done in humans to see if finasteride can increase the chance of behavior or learning issues for the child. An animal study reported that use of finasteride in pregnancy might affect memory in some exposed offspring.

Breastfeeding while taking finasteride:

Finasteride use while breastfeeding has not been studied. No information is available on its transfer into human milk.

The product label for finasteride recommends women who are breastfeeding not use this medication during breastfeeding. This is because there is not enough information available on the use of finasteride to know if or how it could affect breastfeeding or the nursing infant. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about all your breastfeeding questions.

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

Men taking finasteride should discuss the benefits and limitations of treatment with their healthcare provider, especially before deciding to stop the medication. Finasteride has been associated with sexual side effects, and some men have had lower sperm counts while taking the medication. Sperm levels have improved after stopping finasteride.

Animal studies have not shown an increased chance of birth defects in offspring when male rats were given finasteride. There have been concerns about possible effects on the development of male sex organs if a pregnancy is exposed during the time when these organs are forming (8–12 weeks of pregnancy). However, only small amounts of finasteride are found in semen, and exposure through semen during vaginal sex is not expected to be high enough to cause problems for a developing fetus.

One recent study reported an association between paternal finasteride use and undescended testicles (cryptorchidism) in male newborns. Other reports of pregnancies with paternal finasteride exposure before or during pregnancy have resulted in healthy, full-term infants without reported birth defects. 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.

Questions? Call 866.626.6847 | Text 855.999.3525 | Email or Chat at MotherToBaby.org.

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