Oxycodone

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

What is oxycodone?
Oxycodone belongs to a class of medications known as opioids. Opioids are sometimes called narcotics. Oxycodone is used to treat moderate to severe pain.

I am taking oxycodone, but I would like to stop taking it before becoming pregnant. How long does it stay in my body?
Talk with your healthcare provider before making any changes to this medication. People clear medications at different rates. In healthy adults, it takes up to 2 days for oxycodone to be gone from the body. It might take a longer time for long acting (extended release) medications.

Will taking oxycodone make it harder for me to get pregnant?
Studies have not been done to see if taking oxycodone could make it harder for a woman to get pregnant.

I just found out I am pregnant. Should I stop taking oxycodone?
If you have been taking oxycodone regularly, or have a dependency (also called opioid use disorder), you should not stop suddenly (also called “cold turkey”). Stopping oxycodone suddenly could cause you to go into withdrawal. More research is needed to know how going through withdrawal might affect a pregnancy. Talk with your healthcare providers about the risks and benefits of continuing or stopping your medication. Any reduction in your oxycodone needs to be done under the direction of your healthcare provider.*

Does taking oxycodone during my pregnancy increase the chance of miscarriage?
Miscarriage can occur in any pregnancy. There are no published studies looking at whether taking oxycodone increases the chance of miscarriage. This does not mean there is an increased chance or that there is no increased chance, it only means that this question has not been answered.

I have heard that opioids may cause birth defects when used in early pregnancy. Is this true?
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. Not every opioid medication has been studied on its own; therefore, we do not know if these medications increase the chance for birth defects or not. Some studies suggest that opioids as a general group might be associated with birth defects including heart defects and cleft lip and palate. However, these and other studies have not found a specific pattern of birth defects caused by opioids. Based on available studies, if there is an increased chance for birth defects with opioid use in pregnancy, it is likely to be small.

Could taking oxycodone cause other pregnancy complications?
Studies involving women who often use opioids during their pregnancy have found an increased chance for pregnancy complications such as poor growth of the baby, stillbirth, premature delivery, and need for c-section. This is more commonly reported in women who are taking a drug like heroin or who are using prescribed pain medications in greater amounts or for longer than recommended by their healthcare provider. Use of an opioid close to the time of delivery can result in withdrawal symptoms in the baby (see the section below on Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome).*
Will my baby have withdrawal (neonatal abstinence syndrome) if I continue to take oxycodone in my pregnancy?

Studies have reported a risk for neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS) with some opioid medications; however, not all opioid medications have been studied. Based on what we know about the risk of NAS with other opioids, it is likely that oxycodone also carries a risk for NAS. Because there are not enough studies, we do not know if the risk is higher or lower than with other better studied opioids.

NAS is the term used to describe withdrawal symptoms in newborns from medication that a mother takes during pregnancy. For any opioid, symptoms can include difficulty breathing, extreme drowsiness (sleepiness), poor feeding, irritability, sweating, tremors, vomiting and diarrhea. Most often, symptoms of NAS appear two days after birth and might last more than two weeks. If needed, babies can be treated for withdrawal. If you used an opioid medication, it is important that your healthcare providers know to check for symptoms of NAS.

Will taking oxycodone during pregnancy affect my child’s behavior or cause learning problems?

There are not enough studies on oxycodone to know whether there is a chance for long-term problems. Some studies on opioids as a general group have found more problems with learning and behavior in children exposed to opioids for a long period of time during pregnancy. It is hard to tell if this is due to the medication exposure or other factors such as use of other substances that can increase the chances of these problems.

What if I have been taking more oxycodone than recommended by my healthcare provider?

Studies find that pregnant women who take opioids in higher doses or for longer than recommended by their healthcare providers (i.e. misuse or abuse opioids) have an increased risk for pregnancy problems. These include poor growth of the baby, stillbirth, premature delivery, and the need for C-section. Some women who abuse opioids also have unhealthy and risky lifestyles that can result in health problems for both the mother and the baby. For example, poor diet choices can lead to mothers not having enough nutrients to support a healthy pregnancy and could increase the chance of miscarriage and premature birth. Sharing needles to inject opioids increases the risk of getting diseases like hepatitis C and/or HIV which can cross the placenta and infect the baby.

Can I breastfeed my baby if I am taking oxycodone?

It depends on the age of your baby, the dose of medication and other factors. Oxycodone enters into breast milk. Newborn infants may have difficulty with even small amounts of oxycodone in breastmilk. Older nursing babies might also have problems with the amounts of oxycodone that could be in the breast milk. Speak to your healthcare provider about your pain and medications that can be used while you are breastfeeding.*

Use of some opioids in breastfeeding can cause the baby to be very sleepy and have trouble latching on. Opioid medications can cause difficulty with breathing and in some cases have resulted in death. If you are using any opioid, your baby should be watched carefully. The baby’s health care provider should be contacted right away if your baby has any problems. Speak to your healthcare provider about your pain and medications that may be used safely while you are breastfeeding.

If a man takes oxycodone, could it affect his fertility (ability to get partner pregnant) or increase the chance of birth defects?

There are no studies available to answer this question for men using oxycodone. 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/.*

* Section Updated May 2020

Please click here for references.