Oxymetazoline

This sheet is about exposure to oxymetazoline 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 oxymetazoline?

Oxymetazoline is a medication that has been used to treat nasal congestion, eye inflammation, and skin redness. It works by temporarily making the blood vessels narrower (constricting blood vessels) in the area where it is applied. Oxymetazoline can be found in prescription and over the counter nasal sprays (sprayed into the nose), eye drops, and topical preparations (applied to the skin). Some brand names are Afrin®, Dristan®, Nostrilla®, Rhofade®, and Vicks®.

Sometimes when people 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 your 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 oxymetazoline. Can it make it harder for me to get pregnant?

Studies have not been done to see if oxymetazoline can make it harder to get pregnant.

Does taking oxymetazoline 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 oxymetazoline can increase the chance of miscarriage.

Does taking oxymetazoline 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 oxymetazoline, might increase the chance of birth defects in a pregnancy. Studies do not suggest a higher chance of birth defects with the use of oxymetazoline at recommended doses in pregnancy.

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

Studies have not been done to see if oxymetazoline can increase the chance of 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).

In a report of 12 pregnancies in women with allergies, sinus infection, or a cold, but who were otherwise healthy, a one-time nasal spray dose of oxymetazoline did not change blood flow to the uterus.

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

Studies have not been done to see if oxymetazoline can cause behavior or learning issues for the child.

Breastfeeding while taking oxymetazoline:

Oxymetazoline has not been studied for use while breastfeeding. When it is used as directed in the nose, in the eyes, or on the skin, very little of the medication is thought to be absorbed into the body or get into breast milk. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about all your breastfeeding questions.

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

Studies have not been done to see if oxymetazoline could affect a man's fertility (ability to get a woman pregnant) or 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 to view references.

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