

# Prednisone/Prednisolone

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This sheet is about exposure to oral prednisone or prednisolone in pregnancy and while breastfeeding. This information is based on available research studies. It should not take the place of medical care and advice from your healthcare provider.

## ***What are prednisone and prednisolone?***

Prednisone and prednisolone belong to a group of medications called corticosteroids. In the body, prednisone is broken down into prednisolone. Prednisone and prednisolone are used to treat many conditions, such as asthma, autoimmune diseases and skin conditions. They help prevent or suppress inflammation (swelling and irritation) and immune responses. Prednisone and prednisolone are prescribed in a wide range of doses, depending on what condition is being treated.

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 prednisone or prednisolone. Can it make it harder for me to get pregnant?***

Taking prednisone or prednisolone is not expected to make it harder to get pregnant.

## ***Does taking prednisone or prednisolone increase the chance of miscarriage?***

Miscarriage is common and can occur in any pregnancy for many different reasons. Taking prednisone or prednisolone is not expected to increase the chance of miscarriage.

## ***Does taking prednisone or prednisolone 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 prednisone or prednisolone, might increase the chance of birth defects in a pregnancy.

Taking prednisone or prednisolone is not expected to significantly increase the chance of birth defects. Older studies suggested a small increased chance of a cleft lip and/or palate (an opening in the upper lip or the roof of the mouth), following the use of prednisone or prednisolone during the first trimester. However, newer studies and further review of the older studies do not support this finding. If there is an increased chance, it appears to be very small and most pregnancies would not be affected.

## ***Does taking prednisone or prednisolone in pregnancy increase the chance of other pregnancy-related problems?***

Taking an oral corticosteroid like prednisone or prednisolone long-term during pregnancy has been associated with an increased chance of preterm delivery (birth before week 37) and low birth weight (weighing less than 5 pounds, 8 ounces [2500 grams] at birth). However, since corticosteroids are used to treat medical conditions that can increase the chance of preterm delivery and low birth weight, these effects might be related to the illnesses being treated and not the medications alone. Other studies have shown that using prednisone or prednisolone might improve some pregnancy outcomes. The benefits of taking prednisone or prednisolone and treating your condition should be weighed against possible risks to the pregnancy.

## ***Does taking prednisone or prednisolone in pregnancy affect future behavior or learning for the child?***

It is not known if prednisone or prednisolone can increase the chance of behavior or learning issues.

## ***Breastfeeding while taking prednisone or prednisolone:***

Prednisone and prednisolone get into breast milk in small amounts. Prednisone is like the body's natural hormones that are needed for milk production. There are reports of infants who been exposed to prednisone or prednisolone

through breast milk and have not had side effects.

The amount of prednisone or prednisolone in breast milk might be higher if someone is taking higher doses. High doses might occasionally cause temporary loss of milk supply. Keeping the dose as low as possible can help limit the amount in the breast milk. Levels of prednisone or prednisolone in breast milk are likely to be highest about 1 to 2 hours after taking the medication. Waiting 4 hours after taking it before breastfeeding can also limit the amount of medication the baby gets in the breast milk but may not be necessary for everyone. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about all your breastfeeding questions.

***If a male takes prednisone or prednisolone, could it affect fertility or increase the chance of birth defects?***

Small studies on people who had organ transplants and were being treated with medications that suppress the immune system (including prednisone and prednisolone) did not report lower rates of male fertility (ability to get partner pregnant). Studies have not been done to see if taking prednisone or prednisolone 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.**

**Questions? Call 866.626.6847 | Text 855.999.3525 | Email or Chat at [MotherToBaby.org](https://mothertobaby.org).**

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