This sheet talks about exposure to oral prednisone or prednisolone in a pregnancy and while breastfeeding. This information 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.

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

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

I just found out I am pregnant. Should I stop taking prednisone or prednisolone?

Talk with your healthcare provider before making any changes to how you take this medication. The benefits of taking prednisone or prednisolone and treating your condition should be weighed against any possible risk to the pregnancy.

Does taking prednisone or prednisolone increase the chance of miscarriage?

Miscarriage can occur in any pregnancy. Using prednisone or prednisolone is not expected to increase the chance of miscarriage.

Does taking prednisone or prednisolone increase the chance of birth defects?

Every pregnancy starts out with a 3-5% chance of having a birth defect. This is called the background risk. Using prednisone or prednisolone is not expected to significantly increase this background birth defect chance. Older studies suggested a small increased chance for having a baby with a cleft lip, with or without a cleft palate, 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.

Could taking prednisone or prednisolone cause other pregnancy complications?

Taking an oral corticosteroid like prednisone or prednisolone long-term during pregnancy has been associated with an increased chance for preterm delivery (delivery before 37 weeks of pregnancy) and/or lower birth weight than expected. However, since corticosteroids are used to treat medical conditions that can increase the chance of preterm delivery and low birth weight, these effects may 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 any possible risks to the pregnancy.

Does taking prednisone or prednisolone in pregnancy cause long-term problems in behavior or learning for the baby?

Based on the data available, it is not known if prednisone or prednisolone can cause behavior or learning issues.

Can I breastfeed while taking prednisone or prednisolone?

The amounts of prednisone and prednisolone that enter breast milk are very small. Prednisone is similar to the body’s natural hormones that are needed for milk production and infant health. Since people produce these hormones naturally, it is unlikely that the amount of prednisone or prednisolone in the breast milk would cause harmful effects in the nursing infant.

The amount of prednisone or prednisolone in breast milk might be higher if taking higher doses. High doses might occasionally cause temporary loss of milk supply. Keeping the dose as low as possible will 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 breast feeding can also limit the amount of medication the baby gets in the breast milk, but may not be necessary for everyone.

There are reports of infants who been exposed to prednisone or prednisolone through breast milk and have not had negative effects. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about all of your breastfeeding questions.

**I take prednisone or prednisolone. Can it make it harder for me to get my partner pregnant or increase the chance of birth defects?**

Small studies on people who had organ transplants and were being treated with prednisone, prednisolone or other immunosuppressant medications, did not observe lower rates of fertility. Low dose prednisone may help increase sperm motility and pregnancy rates for some people with infertility.

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/pdf/.

MotherToBaby is currently conducting studies looking at asthma and autoimmune diseases and the medications used to treat these diseases in pregnancy. If you are interested in taking part in one of these studies, please call 1-877-311-8972 or sign up at https://mothertobaby.org/join-study/.

Please click here for references.