

Learning About Taking Opioids During Pregnancy

What are opioids?

Opioids are strong pain medicines. Examples include fentanyl, hydrocodone, and morphine. Heroin is an example of an illegal opioid.

Your body gets used to this type of drug if you take it all the time. This is called physical dependence. And over time, you may need a higher dose to get pain relief. This is called tolerance. When you stop taking it, you may feel sick (withdrawal).

Side effects of opioids may include:

- Constipation.
- Nausea or vomiting.
- Feeling sleepy.
- Trouble urinating.
- Low sex drive.

Opioid medicine can cause serious problems, and even death, especially if it's misused.

How does using an opioid during pregnancy affect the baby?

When you take an opioid, the drug passes through the placenta and enters the baby's bloodstream. It affects the baby in much the same way as it affects you. The baby's body gets used to the drug. After birth, when the drug starts to leave the body, the baby goes through withdrawal. This may happen within hours after birth or later, depending on the drug.

This problem is called neonatal abstinence syndrome, or NAS.

Babies with NAS may be cranky and jittery. They may cry a lot and have problems feeding and sleeping. This can be stressful for you and your baby. But most babies recover after the body has rid itself of the drug. The length of time it takes for the body to get rid of the drug depends on the drug and how much is in the body.

Opioid use during pregnancy may also cause:

- Premature birth.
- Stillbirth.
- Birth defects.
- Low birth weight.

How is use of opioids during pregnancy treated?

Don't stop taking an opioid on your own. If you stop suddenly, it could cause premature birth or stillbirth. Talk to your doctor first about treatment.

Treatment is called medication-assisted treatment, or MAT. During MAT, you take a medicine—usually methadone or buprenorphine—in place of the opioid you were using. You can start MAT while you are pregnant.

Besides helping to manage withdrawal symptoms in you and your baby, this treatment also helps to reduce cravings.

Treatment may also include group therapy, one or more types of counseling, and drug education.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

Where can you learn more?

Go to <https://www.healthwise.net/patiented>

Enter **E439** in the search box to learn more about "**Learning About Taking Opioids During Pregnancy**".

©2006-2023 Healthwise, Incorporated.

This care instruction is for use with your licensed healthcare professional. If you have questions about a medical condition or this instruction, always ask your healthcare professional. Healthwise, Incorporated disclaims any warranty or liability for your use of this information.