

Acetaminophen use in pregnancy



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Pharmacists are often asked about the safety of medications in pregnancy. Recently, media reports in the U.S. have suggested a link between acetaminophen use in pregnancy and autism spectrum disorder (ASD). These headlines may leave your patients with questions or concerns at the pharmacy counter. This FAQ provides pharmacists with clear, evidence-based information to help address patient questions and guide discussions about the use of acetaminophen in pregnancy.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Is acetaminophen safe to use during pregnancy?

Yes. When taken at recommended doses and for the shortest time needed, acetaminophen is still considered a safe and appropriate first-line option for managing pain and fever in pregnancy by major international medical organizations such as Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada (SOGC), American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, and European Network of Teratology Information Services.

Does taking acetaminophen in pregnancy cause autism spectrum disorder (ASD)?

No. The current evidence does not prove a direct link. While some studies suggest an association, the findings are not causal and do not apply to intermittent use at recommended doses.

Should I stop taking acetaminophen now that I'm pregnant?

No. If you have an indication (such as pain or fever), you can continue to use acetaminophen as needed. Untreated pain and fever in pregnancy can increase the risk of complications for both pregnant person and baby including fetal organ malformations, fetal cardiovascular complications and even ASD, and should not be ignored. Furthermore, leaving pain untreated may contribute to depression, anxiety, and elevated blood pressure, all of which can negatively impact pregnancy outcomes.

I've already taken acetaminophen while pregnant – have I harmed my baby?

No. Evidence suggests that short-term use at recommended doses is not harmful to a developing baby.

Are there safer alternatives for pain or fever during pregnancy?

Acetaminophen remains the preferred choice for pain and fever in pregnancy. Other medications, such as opioids (e.g., codeine) and NSAIDs (e.g., ibuprofen, naproxen), may increase the risk of birth defects, breathing problems in the newborn, or dependence. Non-drug approaches – such as rest, hydration, and hot or cold therapy – may also help, depending on the symptoms.

How much acetaminophen is safe to take while pregnant?

The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada (SOGC) recommends the lowest effective dose for the shortest possible time:

- 325–650 mg every 4–6 hours as needed
- Limit use to 3–5 consecutive days

If symptoms persist beyond this, patients should consult a healthcare provider for further assessment.

Acetaminophen remains a **safe first-line option** for managing pain and fever during pregnancy when used appropriately.

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