

Taking medication with codeine to relieve pain

Information for breastfeeding mothers

Your caregiver may prescribe a medication with codeine to help relieve pain after childbirth. As with most medications, a small amount can pass into your breastmilk. Most mothers and babies have no problem when codeine is taken for a short time. However, for a small number of breastfed babies, codeine may cause harmful side effects.

Your body naturally changes some of the codeine into morphine. The amount of codeine and morphine that passes into breastmilk is not enough to harm most babies.

Some examples of medications that contain codeine are Tylenol #3, Tylenol #2, and Tylenol #1 in decreasing amounts.

Who is most at risk for serious side effects?

- Newborn babies are more at risk for side effects from codeine than older children or adults.
- If codeine is used for longer than 4 days, there is a chance it can build up in your breast milk and reach the baby in larger amounts.

Turn over for information to help you take medications with codeine safely



Information to help you take medications with codeine safely:

1. Take medications containing codeine only "as needed".

- Take the smallest amount of codeine possible, for as short a time as possible to help manage your pain.
- Try to use codeine for less than 4 days.
- While you are in hospital, do not take any of your own pain pills brought in from home.

2. Use medications *without* codeine to help relieve your pain.

- As your pain decreases, switch to another medication that does not contain codeine, such as Ibuprofen or Acetaminophen.
- If your prescribed medication does not relieve your pain, talk with your nurse, doctor or midwife or pharmacist.

3. Make a plan for controlling your pain at home.

- Talk with your doctor, midwife, pharmacist or lactation consultant about which medication is safest to use at home if you need it for pain relief.
- Do not take any 'over-the-counter' medications that contain codeine without talking to your pharmacist or health care provider and telling them you are breastfeeding.

4. Your nurse will check you and your baby for side effects.

In the hospital, call your nurse immediately if you notice ANY of the following problems:

- You are very drowsy or dizzy.
- You feel confused or your breathing is shallow.
- Your baby is very sleepy, difficult to wake, or is limp.
- Your baby is not feeding or does not wake up to feed.
- Your baby has trouble breathing or begins to turn blue.

At home, if you or your baby have ANY of the above symptoms:

- **STOP taking the medication with codeine**
- **CALL your doctor or midwife IMMEDIATELY**
- **DO NOT WAIT for you or your baby's next appointment**

If you are unable to reach your doctor or midwife, take your baby to the nearest hospital emergency room or call 911.

For questions or more information:

- Speak with your doctor, midwife, nurse, lactation consultant or pharmacist
- Call Motherisk at 416-813-6780 or visit www.motherisk.org