

## **Mom's Heartburn Meds Carry Asthma Risk?**

Children Whose Mothers Take Prescription Acid Blockers More Likely to Have Breathing Disorder, Study Shows

WebMD Medical News

By Charlene Laino

Reviewed by Louise Chang, MD

March 18, 2008

March 18, 2008 (Philadelphia) -- If you're one of the millions of women who suffer from heartburn during pregnancy, a cautionary note: New research suggests that some acid-blocking drugs used to treat the condition can raise the odds that your child will develop asthma.

A review of data on nearly 30,000 children shows that those whose mothers took prescription acid-blocking drugs during pregnancy were 51% more likely to suffer from wheezing, breathing difficulties, and other symptoms of asthma.

The researchers looked only at heartburn drugs, including H2 blockers like Axid, Pepcid, Tagamet, and Zantac, and proton pump inhibitors such as Prilosec, Prevacid, Aciphex, Protonix, and Nexium.

Over-the-counter antacids such as Tums, Rolaids, and Maalox were not studied.

### **Limit Use of Medications**

Women who have taken the drugs during pregnancy shouldn't panic, says researcher Elizabeth Yen, MD, a child health specialist at Harvard and Children's Hospital Boston.

"Much more study needs to be done," she tells WebMD.

At the same time, pregnant women should limit their use of the medications, Yen says.

The medications should only be taken "if you're having persistent heartburn that is interfering with your quality of life. And even then, always check with your doctor first," she says.

### **Heartburn Strikes 1 in 2 Pregnant Women**

More than half of all pregnant women report symptoms of severe heartburn, particularly during their second and third trimesters. Heartburn is typically a burning sensation of the esophagus, most commonly linked to gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) or acid reflux.

Yen says previous studies have shown that "if you give acid-blocking drugs and test someone's blood, there is evidence of immune system chemicals called cytokines that set you up for an allergic reaction."

To determine if there was a link between taking the drugs in pregnancy and childhood allergies or asthma, the researchers analyzed data from three Swedish national health care registries.

The registries included data on 29,490 children, aged 2 to 11, who had been discharged from the hospital with a diagnosis of allergies and/or asthma. A total of 5,645 of the children had been exposed to acid-blocking drugs in the womb.

There was no link between taking acid blockers in pregnancy and food allergies, hay fever, or other allergic diseases except for asthma.

The findings were presented here at the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology (AAAAI).

### **Acid-Blocking Drugs in Pregnancy**

Former AAAAI president William Busse, MD, head of the allergy section at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, says a link between the use of acid-blocking drugs in pregnancy and childhood asthma makes sense from a physiological point of view.

"We know that some immune system regulation that protects us against asthma has its origins in the [acidic] GI tract," he tells WebMD. "So one has to wonder that if you take drugs that suppress acid in the GI tract, you may be modifying the normal immune surveillance."

The new study offers "a novel, intriguing observation" that we should study further, Busse says.

### **Tips to Reduce Heartburn During Pregnancy**

Experts offer these tips for reducing heartburn without hurting your baby:

- Eat several small meals each day instead of three large ones.
- Eat slowly.
- Avoid fried, fatty, spicy, or rich foods, chocolate, mint, carbonated drinks, citrus fruits or juices, tomato, or tomato sauce.
- Don't lie down directly after eating.
- Keep the head of your bed higher than the foot of your bed.
- Ask your doctor about using medications such as Tums or Maalox, which are generally safe to use during pregnancy. You may find liquid heartburn relievers helpful in treating heartburn, as they coat the esophagus.
- Wear loose-fitting clothing. Tight-fitting clothes can increase the pressure on your stomach and abdomen.