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Antihistamines and Breastfeeding (Hayfever and other allergies)

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Can breast feeding mothers take antihistamines for hayfever and other allergies?

Nasal sprays and eye drops act locally and are unlikely to pass into breastmilk. Non sedating antihistamines such as loratadine are the preferred oral antihistamines. Short courses of chlorpheniramine e.g. to control nettle rash is unlikely to cause significant drowsiness in the baby but is best avoided long term.

Many mothers prefer to take as few medicines as possible whilst they are breastfeeding, hayfever can make life particularly unpleasant during the summer months, if left untreated. At other times sudden symptoms of allergy may cause a rash or swelling.

Most of the drugs to treat allergies are available to buy over the counter but the leaflets may say that they are not suitable to take whilst you are breastfeeding. This does not necessarily mean that they are dangerous, merely that the drug company has not undertaken trials itself and has chosen not to recommend its use in this situation. Often we know all that we need to satisfy any concerns over safety.

Nasal sprays act locally to relieve rhinitis and congestion. They will only pass into breastmilk in very small quantities and can safely be used during lactation.

Corticosteroids may be used to block the allergic response locally e.g. Beclometasone (Beconase®), Fluticasone (Flixonase®), Budesonide (Rhinocort®), Dexamethasone (Dexa-Rhinospray®), Mometasone (Nasonex®) Triamcinolone (Nasocort®).

Decongestants e.g. Xylometazoline (Otrivine®) may be useful to some patients

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Calls to 0300 numbers cost no more than calls to UK numbers starting 01 and 02 and will be part of any inclusive minutes that apply to your provider and call package

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Eye drops also act locally and can be used during lactation. E.g. sodium cromoglycate (Opticrom®)

Antihistamines are tablets widely used to treat the symptoms of hayfever and allergy.

Sedating antihistamines e.g. Chlorpheniramine (Piriton®), Promethazine (Phenergan®) and Trimeprazine (Vallergan®) taken three times a day are very useful to treat severe itching in an urticarial rash. However they cause significant drowsiness in some patients. Short-term use during lactation is unlikely to produce a problem for the baby but taken over more than one or two weeks may cause the baby to become drowsy, miss feeds and fail to thrive.

Non sedating antihistamines are taken once a day e.g. Loratadine (Clarityn®) and Cetirizine (Zirtek®). They are both available as paediatric syrups to be given to children over 2 years. The amount that gets through in breastmilk is low and unlikely to cause any problems. Fexofenadine (Telfast®) is a newer antihistamine with similar low levels of transfer and no reports of adverse events.