



## Using Psychotropic Medications during Pregnancy and Lactation

### **General Issues for all Psychotropic Medications** <sup>1,2,3,4</sup>

- **Avoid** medications in first trimester, if possible
- Taper medications if discontinuing
- Use monotherapy whenever possible
- Use the lowest **effective** dose

### **Psychotropic Medications in Pregnancy**

#### First Trimester:

#### **Antidepressants:** <sup>2,5,6,7</sup>

- Evidence indicates no increased risk of major malformation in the newborn or spontaneous abortion following exposure to antidepressants in early pregnancy
- There is no indication to stop tricyclics or SSRIs as a matter of routine in early pregnancy
- If a pregnant woman becomes depressed antidepressant medication should be prescribed with caution
- Significant literature supports the safety of TCAs, especially Nortriptyline and Desipramine

#### **Lithium:** <sup>5,9,8</sup>

- Early studies suggest that the risk of malformations and Epstein Barr, from exposure to lithium early in pregnancy may have been overestimated.
- Women with severe bipolar illness successfully maintained on lithium should carefully consider the risks and benefits of lithium.
- The risks of lithium to the fetus and the effects of lithium withdrawal on the mother should be discussed before pregnancy

#### **Anticonvulsants :** <sup>5</sup>

- Anticonvulsants (carbamazepine, valproate, lamotrigine increase the risk of congenital malformations.
- The risk is higher with valproate especially at doses over 1000 mg/day
- Several of these drugs are folate antagonists.
- All women on anticonvulsants should receive extra folate
- **AVOID** valproate as a mood stabilizer in pregnancy

#### **Benzodiazepines:** <sup>4,5,10</sup>

- Evidence suggests exposure may increase risk of cleft palate
- **AVOID** benzodiazepines in the first trimester
- **AVOID** diazepam especially because of its high milk to plasma ratio
- Lorazepam has lower milk to plasma ratio

#### Second and Third Trimester:

#### **Antidepressants:** <sup>2,5,6,7</sup>

- Neonates exposed to psychotropic medications during pregnancy should be monitored for withdrawal syndromes after delivery

- 12 out of 55 (22 percent) reported cases of treatment with paroxetine showed evidence of withdrawal requiring treatment

**Lithium:** <sup>5, 9 8</sup>

- Newborn infants of women treated with lithium in later pregnancy face potential risks of neonatal toxicity, thyroid and renal dysfunction

*Consideration should be given to dose reduction and/or discontinuation two to four weeks before the expected date of delivery with recommencement after delivery*

**Footnote:** <sup>7,11,12</sup>

*Because of the issues surrounding pregnancy and lactation there are:*

- No controlled studies
- *Most information comes from case reports or pharmaceutical registry*
- *The greatest amount of data exists for fluoxetine, TCAs and citalopram*
- *There is no information on trazadone, mirtazapine or nefazadone*
- *Sertraline has lower umbilical cord levels than fluoxetine*

**Psychotropic Medications in Lactation**

*If a breast-feeding mother is taking psychotropic medication, infant development should be monitored and a careful assessment made of the risks and benefits*

**Antidepressants:** <sup>13,14</sup>

- TCAs: Significant literature to supports safety especially Nortriptyline and Desipramine
- Doxepin: One case of respiratory depression reported
- Sertraline, paroxetine and fluvoxamine: Relative infant dose of 0.3-0.5
- No adverse clinical effects have been reported in breast-fed infants of mothers taking paroxetine (also has the lowest milk plasma ratio of sertraline, paroxetine and fluvoxamine.
- Fluoxetine and Citalopram: Relative infant dose of 1-6 (two adverse drug reactions one infant adverse drug reaction with fluoxetine)
- Little evidence on Fluvoxamine
- Clomipramine Use with caution

**Lithium:** <sup>13,14</sup>

- Lithium is excreted in breast milk at 40 percent of maternal serum levels
- Lithium toxicity has been described in breast-fed infants
- **AVOID** breast feeding while taking lithium

**Anticonvulsants :** <sup>13,14</sup>

- Valproate is excreted at levels of 1 to 2 percent maternal serum levels and no clinical adverse effects have been noted
- Carbamazepine is excreted in ranges from 6 to 65 percent of maternal serum levels
- Valproate, Carbamazepine both considered compatible with nursing by American Academy of Pediatrics.

**Benzodiazepines:** <sup>13,14</sup>

- **AVOID** new prescriptions of benzodiazepines (except where there are concerns about drug dependence when breast feeding may be beneficial if the infant was exposed to benzodiazepines in utero)
- Excreted in breast milk with low milk/plasma ratio
- Clonazepam most commonly used during lactation. No adverse drug reactions reported

**Anti-psychotics:**<sup>13,14</sup>

- All antipsychotics are excreted in breast milk but there is no evidence to suggest that breast fed infants are at risk of toxicity or impaired development

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