

PREGNANCY:

Methadone and Buprenorphine



HOW SAFE IS IT TO TAKE METHADONE OR BUPRENORPHINE (SUBUTEX®) DURING PREGNANCY?

- In the right doses, both methadone and buprenorphine stop withdrawal, reduce craving, and block effects of other opioids.
- Treatment with either methadone or buprenorphine makes it more likely that the baby will grow normally and not come too early.
- Based on many years of research studies, neither medicine has been associated with birth defects.
- Babies born to women who are addicted to heroin or prescription opioids can have temporary withdrawal or abstinence symptoms in the baby (Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome or NAS). These withdrawal symptoms (NAS) also can occur in babies whose mothers take methadone or buprenorphine
- Talk with your doctor about the benefits versus the risks of medication treatment along with the risks of not taking medication treatment.

IS METHADONE OR BUPRENORPHINE A BETTER MEDICATION FOR ME IN PREGNANCY?

- A pregnant woman and her doctor should discuss both methadone and buprenorphine. The choice may be limited by which medication is available in your community.
- If a woman is already stable on methadone or buprenorphine and she becomes pregnant, doctors usually advise her to stay on the same medication.

Some women are surprised to learn they got pregnant while using heroin, Oxycontin, Percocet or other pain medications that can be misused (known as opioid drugs). You, along with family and friends, may worry about your drug use and if it could affect your baby.

Some women may want to “detox” as a way to stop using heroin or pain medicines. Unfortunately, studies have shown that 8 out of 10 women return to drug use by a month after “detox.” Therefore, most doctors treat opioid misuse in pregnant women with either methadone or buprenorphine. These are long-acting opioid medications that are associated with improved outcomes in pregnancy.

HOW CAN I GET STARTED ON METHADONE OR BUPRENORPHINE?

- Depending where you live, there may be a special program that offers care to pregnant women who need methadone or buprenorphine. These programs can offer prenatal care and substance use counseling along with your medication.
- Methadone may only be given out by specialized clinics while buprenorphine may also be available from your primary care physician or obstetrician if they have received special training.
- Some women will prefer or benefit from starting these medications while in a residential (inpatient) treatment facility.

WHAT IS THE BEST DOSE OF METHADONE OR BUPRENORPHINE DURING AND AFTER PREGNANCY?

There is no “best” dose of either medication in pregnancy. Every woman should take the dose of methadone or buprenorphine that is right for her.

- The “right” dose will prevent withdrawal symptoms without making you too tired.
- The right dose depends on how your body processes the medications.
- In pregnancy, you process these medications more quickly, especially in the last several months and this affects what dose you need.
- The dose of methadone usually needs to increase with pregnancy – especially in the third trimester and you may need to take methadone more than once a day.
- There is less known about buprenorphine dose changes in pregnancy, but increases may be necessary.
- The dose does not seem to determine how much NAS a baby will have.
- After delivery, the methadone or buprenorphine dose may remain the same or may decrease as your body returns to its non-pregnant state. This can take up to a few months after delivery.

Your dose should be reduced if it begins to cause sedation. Be sure to discuss whether you are feeling too sleepy with your doctors, nurses, and counselors. *For further information, please see brochure [Childbirth, Breastfeeding and Infant Care: Methadone and Buprenorphine](#).*