

Breastfeeding and Medication



Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

I came off my medication to conceive and my baby is now 6 months old. I am really struggling to think straight now and getting really overwhelmed by the smallest of things.

I have been informed by nurse to exercise caution. She has told me I should pump for my baby through the day and when I said I didn't want to do that she said I would have to regularly check his heart rate, pulse, weight and growth, visit the health visitor weekly and check for lethargy, hyperactivity and loss of appetite. She then compared it to mothers who take crack cocaine. I am a bit freaked out now to be honest but also in my experience medical professionals are often overly cautious with meds in breastfeeding so I wondered if perhaps nurse is overly concerned, and it would be fine. Before I decline the drug I, thought I would ask if you have any knowledge of it impacting negatively on babies' growth or heart rate?

Description

ADHD is a disorder that includes symptoms such as inattentiveness, hyperactivity, and impulsiveness. It is normally diagnosed in childhood, but some parents have found themselves being diagnosed when seeking a diagnosis for their children. The cause is unknown, but it seems to at least in part, genetic. It has been suggested that being born prematurely (before the 37th week of pregnancy), having a low birth weight or maternal smoking or alcohol or drug abuse during pregnancy may be linked. Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is thought to affect about 1 in 20 children in the UK with incidence being three times higher in boys.

Symptoms fall into 2 categories:

inattentiveness main symptoms of which are:

- having a short attention span and being easily distracted
- making careless mistakes
- appearing forgetful or losing things

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- being unable to stick to tasks that are tedious
- appearing to be unable to listen to or carry out instructions
- constantly changing activity or task
- having difficulty organising tasks

hyperactivity and impulsiveness main symptoms of which are:

- being unable to sit still and constantly fidgeting
- being unable to concentrate on tasks
- excessive physical movement
- excessive talking
- being unable to wait turn
- acting without thinking
- interrupting conversations
- little or no sense of danger

ADHD may be linked with anxiety, autism, and several other conditions. By the age of 25, an estimated 15% of people diagnosed with ADHD as children still have a full range of symptoms, and 65% still have some symptoms that affect their daily lives. (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-adhd/symptoms/>)

Treatment



Methylphenidate (Ritalin™, Concerta™); works by increasing the amount of a dopamine in the parts of the brain responsible for self-control and attention. It is usually the first line treatment. There are side effects of loss of appetite and difficulty sleeping and mood swings. Limited evidence indicates that methylphenidate levels in milk are very low and not detectable in infant serum. The effects of methylphenidate in milk on the neurological development of the infant have not been well studied. Monitor the baby for agitation, irritability, poor sleeping patterns, changes in feeding and poor weight gain.



Atomoxetine is a selective noradrenaline reuptake inhibitor (SNRI), increasing levels of noradrenaline rather than dopamine. It can aid concentration and help control impulses. Side effects include rise in blood pressure and heart rate, nausea and vomiting, gastric pain, difficulty sleeping, dizziness, headaches, and irritability. More importantly it has been associated with suicidal thoughts and liver damage. There is no published experience with atomoxetine during breastfeeding, although reports from the manufacturer found no serious adverse effects in two breastfed infants (Besag 2014).



Dexamphetamine. Side effects include decreased appetite, mood swings, agitation and aggression, dizziness, headaches, nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea. Only used if lisdexamphetamine is helpful but not tolerated. In dosages prescribed for medical indications, some evidence indicates that dextroamphetamine might not affect nursing infants adversely. The effect of dextroamphetamine in milk on the neurological development of the infant has not been well studied. It is possible that large dosages of dextroamphetamine might interfere with milk

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production. Infant Monitoring for agitation, hyperactivity, insomnia, decreased appetite, weight gain, and tremor.



Lisdexamphetamine (Vyvance™) may be offered as first line treatment in adults. Side effects include decreased appetite, aggression or drowsiness, dizziness, headaches, nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea. Lisdexamfetamine is a prodrug of dextroamphetamine. In medicinal dosages, some evidence (5 mothers studied) indicates that dextroamphetamine might not affect nursing infants adversely. The effect of dextroamphetamine in milk on the neurological development of the infant has not been well studied. Infant Monitoring should be for agitation, irritability, poor sleeping patterns and poor weight gain.

The NHS website suggests that for adults with ADHD if you find it hard to stay organised, then make lists, keep diaries, stick up reminders and set aside some time to plan what you need to do

- let off steam by exercising regularly
- find ways to help you relax, such as listening to music or learning relaxation techniques
- if you have a job, speak to your employer about your condition, and discuss anything they can do to help you work better
- talk to your doctor about your suitability to drive, as you will need to tell the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) if your ADHD affects your driving
- contact or join a local or national support group – these organisations can put you in touch with other people in a similar situation, and can be a good source of support, information, and advice

References

- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder: diagnosis and management; NICE guideline (March 2018, updated September 2019)
- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; NICE CKS, May 2018
- Besag FM. ADHD treatment and pregnancy. *Drug Saf.* 2014; 37:397-40
- NHS ADHD <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-adhd/living-with/>

Further Information

AADUK <https://aadduk.org/>

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