

Cold and Flu Care in Pregnancy— Do's and Don'ts

Created by Dr. Denise Helin, OB/GYN at Livingston HealthCare.

Don't...

- miss signs of influenza—cough, fever, severe body aches, etc.
- take Aspirin, Ibuprofen or Aleve when pregnant
- take combination cold & flu medicines or cough suppressants
- use decongestants (phenylephrine or pseudoephedrine) in the first trimester—associated with birth defects
- use nasal decongestants (Afrin) for more than three days—causes rebound congestion
- exercise vigorously
- eat heavy meals or dairy—increases congestion & mucus
- stop breastfeeding—the baby needs mother's antibodies

Do...

- eat lightly—steamed veggies, soups/broth, tea
- stay Hydrated
 - Drink lots of water and tea - hot water w/ lemon & honey for soothing throat and breaking up congestion
 - Gargle with warm salt water to soothe and treat sore throat & dry cough
 - Steam inhalation: place face over bowl of boiled water w/ peppermint or eucalyptus essential oil or in warm shower with essential oil on a wet wash cloth in corner of tub
 - Nasal wash twice daily or nasal spray with saline as needed to loosen congestion

Do...

- rest
 - Use Breathe Right nose strips to reduce congestion
 - Place cool mist humidifier next to bed; clean water daily—may add peppermint or eucalyptus essential oil
- use over-the-counter medicine sparingly
 - Tylenol is okay up to 4000mg in 24 hours
 - Guiafenesin (thins mucus secretions) okay in syrup or caplets (i.e. Mucinex)
 - Herbal or mentholated throat lozenges (Ricola, Traditional Medicinals, Hall's)
 - Pain-relieving throat spray (Chloraseptic)
 - Nasal decongestant spray (Afrin) for severe congestion - use for a max of 3 days
 - Oral decongestants containing pseudoephedrine or phenylephrine **AFTER FIRST TRIMESTER**—side effects of dryness and increased heart rate.
Should limit use.
- consider herbal alternatives for preventing and early treatment of colds/flu, as well as symptom relief. NOTE: most products listed here say "do not use in pregnancy or breastfeeding unless otherwise directed by your doctor"

Cold and flu prevention (immune boosters):

- Cooking with garlic, onion, and ginger
- Adding Astragalus root to broths/soups
- Vitamin C 500-1000mg daily in vitamins and foods

Early treatment of common cold:

- Echinacea
 - Appears to be safe in pregnancy and breastfeeding
 - If taken within first 24-48 hours of exposure/early symptoms, it may reduce severity and duration of cold symptoms by 50%
 - Dosing and form of herb are important:
 - Use E. purpurea "aerial parts" (i.e. leaf and flower) not just "root"
 - Take 2000-3000mg daily for 2-3 days
 - Traditional Medicinals Echinacea Plus Tea has 1000mg per cup
 - Nature's Way Echinacea & Vitamin C" (yellow top bottle) Capsules have 722mg per 2 capsules
 - Notes: Avoid products containing 'Goldenseal'
 - Expect a slight tingling of tongue/throat with teas and tinctures
 - May cause allergy symptoms in people allergic to plant in the Daisy family

Early treatment of common cold (continued):

- Zinc
 - Appears to be safe in pregnancy and breastfeeding
 - Take 15-25mg in lozenge form (zinc gluconate or acetate) every 2 waking hours for up to 2 days at first sign or exposure to cold.
 - Zinc nasal sprays are also effective—follow product directions

Early treatment of influenza:

- Elderberry (*Sambucus nigra*)
 - Is safe in pregnancy and breastfeeding
 - Inhibits viral replication and reduces coughing
 - Begin within first 24-48 hours of symptoms or exposure
 - Sambucol Original Formula Syrup: take 1 tablespoon 4 times daily for up to a week (also comes in Original Formula Capsules)

Symptom relief:

- Grated ginger or cinnamon can be added to hot water plus lemon/honey or teas for added decongestant benefit
- Sage can be used in gargles for antiseptic and soothing benefits: 1 teaspoon dried or 2 teaspoons fresh sage leaf steeped in a cup of near-boiling water for 15 minutes—cool and gargle
- Traditional medicinals teas or lozenges:
 - Throat Coat contains licorice root, slippery elm bark, marshmallow root and wild cherry bark—all are soothing to mucus membranes, mouth and throat
 - HerbaTussin is like Throat Coat but also has eucalyptus and is good for congestion and post-nasal drip