



# Women's Health



Fun Stuff

## Medicines in pregnancy. What is safe?

**M**edication should be avoided whenever possible when trying to conceive and in pregnancy, especially during the first trimester (first 12 weeks). However, if drugs or chemicals are needed, always speak to your GP or pharmacist **before** you take them.

Drugs are rated according to their safety in pregnancy into category A (the safest); B, C (intermediate risk); D and X (best avoided).

Older drugs are generally preferred to new alternatives for which there is less information.

If you take medication, e.g. for high blood pressure or depression, speak to your GP **before** falling pregnant. Certain drugs are preferred in pregnancy and it is best to make any changes in advance or reduce the dose taken.

### Some specific conditions

Always try non-drug measures first, e.g. salt water or steam for sinus problems or dietary fibre for constipation. Some safe drugs are:

- **Fever and pain.** Paracetamol is safe and is the first choice.
- **Constipation.** Docusate and bisacodyl.
- **Heartburn.** Antacids and 'H2 antagonists' such as ranitidine and cimetidine.
- **Nausea & vomiting.** Safe options include ginger, vitamin B6 and antihistamines such as dimenhydrinate and doxylamine.

- **Coughs and colds.** Antihistamines to dry mucus, pholcodine for cough, and nasal decongestant sprays.

### Complementary medicines

Most herbal and homeopathic remedies have not been tested for safety in pregnancy and are not recommended, especially in the first trimester.

Some products you should avoid altogether are vitamin A, aloe vera, arbor vitae, black cohosh, cascara, comfrey, dong quai, feverfew, juniper and passionflower ([www.thewomens.org.au](http://www.thewomens.org.au)).

For more information: NSW (02) 9382 6539; VIC (03) 9344 2277; QLD & TAS 1300 888 763; WA (08) 9340 2723; SA (08) 8161 7222; ACT (02) 6244 3333 ; NT (08) 8922 8499.

[www.otispregnancy.org](http://www.otispregnancy.org), [www.motherisk.org](http://www.motherisk.org)



Ask your GP before taking any medication in pregnancy

## Swine flu news

(sorry, we couldn't resist!)

Patient: Doctor, doctor. I think I have swine flu!

Doctor: Don't worry, rub in this oinkment and I'll call the hambulance.

Patient: I think I have swine flu.

Doctor: You look alright. What's wrong?

Patient: I'm feeling pigheaded and I keep breaking out in rashers.

I just heard on the news that swine flu could potentially be a threat to every single person in Australia. Well it's a good thing I'm married then isn't it?

## Impact of swine flu

2008



2009



## Prostate testing. It's your choice

**T**wo large international studies have recently shed some light on the benefit of screening for prostate cancer in men. However, there is still no clear-cut answer and men aged 40-74 years need to make their own personal choice on whether to be tested. Two tests are used for screening: a PSA test (blood test) and a rectal examination, in which the doctor inserts a finger in the anus (bottom).

### The benefit of screening

The latest research indicates that regular screening may reduce your risk of dying from prostate cancer by a modest 20%. If 1,000 men are regularly screened over 9 years, there will be one less death from prostate cancer during that time: 3 men will die instead of 4.

### The downside

- **Unnecessary treatment.** Half the cancers found are relatively benign and will never cause symptoms or death. However,

many of these are treated, usually by **prostatectomy (removal of the prostate) or radiotherapy.** The research showed that **48 men will receive unnecessary treatment to prevent one death over 9 years.**

- **Treatment complications.** Treatment carries significant risks such as impotence (erectile dysfunction), urinary incontinence (leakage) and bowel problems.
- **Unnecessary biopsies.** If the PSA is raised, a biopsy (a small operation to take a sample) is usually performed. However, the PSA test is unreliable. For every 4 men with a raised PSA, only 1 will have cancer. The other 3 will have the anxiety and discomfort of an unnecessary biopsy.

Men with a family history are at greater risk and may gain more benefit from testing.

It's your call. There is no right or wrong answer. Speak to your GP or visit [www.andrologyaustralia.org](http://www.andrologyaustralia.org) or [www.prostatehealth.org.au](http://www.prostatehealth.org.au).

## Get a swine flu shot

(now being serious for a moment)

The FREE swine flu vaccine is now available from your doctor.

A single dose is recommended for **all** adults, but especially for:

- Pregnant women
- Parents and guardians of infants up to six months old
- People with underlying chronic medical conditions
- Those who are severely obese
- Indigenous Australians
- Frontline health workers
- Community care workers

The vaccine is safe and well tolerated and can be given in pregnancy. It **cannot** give you the flu. One in 10 people get swelling, redness or pain at the injection site.

Pandemic Hotline: 1802007  
[www.healthemergency.gov.au](http://www.healthemergency.gov.au)