

Breastfeeding and Medication



Breastfeeding and bismuth subsalicylate (Pepto Bismol®)

Pepto Bismol is marketed to relieve symptoms of upset stomach and diarrhoea. Its active ingredient is bismuth subsalicylate, so it is related to aspirin which we avoid during breastfeeding at painkilling doses.

We are unsure if bismuth subsalicylate passes into a mother's breast milk. Although bismuth salts are poorly absorbed from the maternal GI tract, significant levels of salicylate could be absorbed in theory. There are currently no reports of Reye's syndrome in babies exposed to bismuth subsalicylate and it is normally only used very short term for stomach upset.

Breastfeeding mothers would be well advised to use alternative products to treat acute diarrhoea E.g. loperamine (Imodium®) if possible. However, In my experience of queries Pepto Bismol may be the only product available late at night and at weekends. The risk of short term use is probably low although this cannot be proved. The decision remains with the mother as to whether she wants to take it. Continuing to breastfeed during a stomach upset transfers antibodies to the baby to offer protection from the bacterial or viral condition.

It is also advertised to treat heartburn and indigestion for which there are many alternative remedies which are safe in breastfeeding, containing aluminium, calcium and magnesium carbonate.

<https://breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/wp-content/dibm/indigestion%20and%20breastfeeding.pdf>

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www.breastfeeding-and-medication.co.uk

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However, I cannot take responsibility for the prescription of medication which remains with the healthcare professionals involved. I am happy to discuss the evidence by email wendy@breastfeeding-and-medication.co.uk