



Medications and Breastfeeding

Do you need to wean to take a medication? *Almost certainly not!* The drug is rarely as risky as formula would be. A single bottle of formula increases the risk of many childhood and adult illnesses and diseases, and disrupts the baby's intestines for up to a month. "*Playing it safe*" *almost always means continued breastfeeding, not weaning.* Here are some of the reasons:

- *Even if a mother's blood level for a given drug is high, it's still very dilute* for her breastfeeding baby to swallow in her milk, digest, and put into his bloodstream.
- *Age matters.* Some drugs that might be a concern for premature infants are not a concern for full-term babies. The older the baby, the less the concern. Some mothers are mistakenly told to wean for a drug that may be given directly to babies or small children.
- *When in doubt,* check the baby's blood or just watch for changes like diarrhea or fussiness.
- *Temporary weaning*—and pumping, and bottle-feeding an unhappy baby—*is a huge physical and emotional stress* during an already stressful time.
- *Breastfeeding is not a faucet.* Turning it off abruptly can mean turning it off permanently. Talk about risks!
- *Further risk reduction:* Nursing before taking the dose, waiting five "half-lives," finding a safer drug or treatment, even nursing part-time—all far better choices than even temporary weaning.
- *Drug companies tend to recommend weaning to avoid litigation. The actual research rarely supports weaning.*

For more information, check Thomas Hale's book *Medications and Mothers' Milk* or:

- LactMed, the U.S. National Institutes of Health's Drugs and Lactation Database
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK501922/?report=classic>
- Thomas Hale's website (Medications & Mothers' Milk)
<https://www.halesmeds.com/>
- E-lactancia, available in English and Spanish
<http://e-lactancia.org/>
- Medsafe, New Zealand Medicines and Medical Devices Safety Authority—drug safety in lactation
<https://www.medsafe.govt.nz/profs/puarticles/lactation.htm>
- Infant Risk Center, evidence-based information on the use of medications during pregnancy and breastfeeding
<http://www.infantrisk.com/>