

Taking Medicine for Your Baby's Lung Development

Your Baby's Lungs

Your baby's lungs are not fully developed until close to the 37th week of pregnancy. Your baby makes a substance that coats the lining of the air sacs. This lets the lungs move without sticking during breathing.

When your baby is born early (premature), the lungs are not fully developed. Your baby may have trouble breathing on his or her own.

Medicine to Help Your Baby's Lungs

If you are expected to give birth between weeks 24 and 34, your doctor may give you a steroid medicine to help your baby's lungs develop.

The medicine acts like the natural substance to let the air sacs slide against each other to prevent sticking.

You will receive shots of the medicine (either betamethasone or dexamethasone) in your hip or buttocks.

betamethasone: You will receive 2 shots 24 hours apart. (You may receive additional shots as directed by your doctor.)

dexamethasone: You will receive 4 shots every 12 hours.

The medicine will lower your baby's chances of breathing problems after birth, bleeding in the brain, or death. When born, your baby will be able to breathe easier with or without a ventilator (machine to help breathing).

Medicine Side Effects

Like all medicine, this medicine has possible short-term side effects. You may have some, all or none of these listed, or you may have other side effects not listed. Most side effects last only a short time.

Side effects may include:

- water retention
- rise in blood pressure
- heart failure or fluid in the lungs
- increased chance of getting infections
- blood glucose issues, especially if you have diabetes. (Talk with your health care provider.)

When To Call Your Doctor or Nurse

Call your doctor or nurse if you have:

- shortness of breath
- a heavy feeling or tightness in your chest
- increased contractions (more often, and stronger, or both)
- any other symptoms.