Use and Safety of Domperidone in Breastfeeding Mothers

What is Domperidone Used For?
As an “off-label” use, domperidone is prescribed to breastfeeding women to enhance their milk production. In Canada, domperidone is also used to treat slowed movement in the digestive tract to reduce symptoms of nausea, vomiting, bloating and feeling of fullness. Moreover, domperidone may be prescribed to prevent stomach problems associated with certain medications used to treat Parkinson’s disease. 1 Usually, prescribed dose is 10-20 mg three times daily for stomach problems. In lactation, the prescribed dose begins at 10 mg four times a day and can be increased to 30 mg four times a day as necessary.

Is it Safe?
Since a minimal quantity of the medication is transferred to the baby through breast milk, domperidone is considered safe for the infant. 2

Recently, Health Canada issued an advisory with regards to the potential increased risk of ventricular arrhythmias (irregular heart beats) and sudden cardiac death associated with the use of domperidone. 3

Why did Health Canada issue a warning?
Two studies have reported an increased risk of sudden cardiac death and ventricular arrhythmias in older individuals (age > 60 years) receiving domperidone. 4, 5 While these studies can show a potential link between the medication and cardiac problems; they can not establish a cause and effect relationship between the two. In other words, the studies did not show that domperidone caused these heart problems. It is important to note that other factors, such as male gender, older age, smoking and pre-existing heart conditions, may increase the risk of these cardiac problems.

Furthermore, one study reported that the use of domperidone in younger adults (age <60 years) appears not to be associated with a significant increased risk of cardiac problems. 5 Since nursing mothers are young, female and generally healthy, the use of domperidone is less likely to expose them to the same risk of cardiac problems as older individuals. Many nursing mothers in Canada have used domperidone to improve their milk production. So far, there have been no reports of serious side effects associated with the use of the medication.

Our Recommendations:
At the HFPC-Goldfarb Breastfeeding Clinic, we believe that the benefits of domperidone in nursing mothers outweigh the possible risk associated with the medication. We continue to support the wishes and the efforts of mothers to provide breast milk for their children. Currently the large amount of data on the risks of infants taking infant formula strongly outweighs the potential and extremely low cardiac risk of taking high dose Domperidone to support breastfeeding and breastmilk feeding. In light of the current data, we continue to consider that the use of domperidone is safe in healthy breastfeeding women.

The decision to use any medication should always identify the known risks and benefits. We encourage our patients to discuss their concerns with their health care professionals prior to stopping domperidone.

References: