

What medications are prescribed to women during their postnatal check?

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Context

- In the United Kingdom (UK) woman has access to midwives and health visitors for the first few days after childbirth.
- They are then discharged to the care of their General Practitioner (GP) who invites them for a planned postnatal check 6-8 weeks after birth, as recommended by National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and the World Health Organisation (WHO).
- This is an opportunity to review a woman's physical and mental health; and assess how they are recovering after pregnancy and birth.

Objective

To determine what medications are prescribed to women during their postnatal check and how these relate to NICE guidelines.

Design

- A descriptive cohort study using UK primary care electronic health records from The Health Improvement Network (THIN) database.
- Women aged 15-49 who gave birth between 1st January 2006 and 31st December 2016 were included.
- A woman's record was examined to identify evidence of having a postnatal check.
- The primary outcome measure was all prescriptions issued at the time of the postnatal check (week 5-10).
- Prescriptions were grouped by British National Formulary (BNF) subchapter to capture distinct health needs, such as antibiotics or antidepressant drugs.

Analysis

- To identify the most common medications issued, the frequency and proportion of each prescription grouping is given as a fraction of all prescriptions in weeks 5-10.



The postnatal check is a **unique opportunity** for women to receive **key medications and preventative care** after childbirth.

The most common medications prescribed in the postnatal check are **contraceptives, antibiotics, antidepressants and pain relief.**

Results

- Of the 309,573 women included in this study, 180,059 (58.2%) had at least one prescription issued in the time period of the postnatal check
- 346,975 prescriptions were issued in total.
- The most common prescriptions related to: contraceptives 116,458 (33.6%); antibiotics 33,594 (9.7%); antidepressants 18,987 (5.5%); pain relief 12,844 (3.7%); local preparations for anal and rectal disorders 12,386 (3.6%); topical corticosteroids 10,309 (3.0%); and laxatives 10,255 (3.0%).

Table 1: The twenty most common prescriptions issued to women at the time of the postnatal check (week 5-10 after childbirth) grouped by British National Formulary (BNF) subchapter

BNF subchapter	Frequency	Proportion (%)
Contraceptives	116,458	33.6
Antibacterial drugs/ antibiotics	33,594	9.7
Antidepressant drugs	18,987	5.5
Analgesics/ pain relief	12,844	3.7
Local preparations for anal and rectal disorders	12,386	3.6
Topical corticosteroids	10,309	3.0
Laxatives	10,255	3.0
Anaemias and some other blood disorders	9,169	2.6
Emollient and barrier preparations	8,939	2.6
Bronchodilators	8,790	2.5
Drugs used in rheumatic diseases and gout	7,972	2.3
Anti-infective skin preparations	7,650	2.2
Thyroid and antithyroid drugs	7,432	2.1
Treatment of vaginal and vulval conditions	5,626	1.6
Corticosteroids	5,613	1.6
Antihistamines, hyposensitisation and allergic emergencies	4,616	1.3
Antifungal drugs	4,127	1.2
Beta-adreceptor blocking drugs	3,971	1.1
Drugs used in diabetes	3,515	1.0
Antisecretory drugs and muscosa protectants	3,465	1.0
Total	346,975	-

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