

## Drug Use During Pregnancy<sup>1</sup>

Your body changes in many ways during pregnancy – some you can see, and others you can't. These changes inside your body can affect the way your body absorbs medications. And your placenta – the organ that develops in your body to nourish your growing baby – passes substances from your system onto your baby. Some medications may be used during certain trimesters and may be unsafe during others. Organizations like the CDC and FDA are working to make information about using medications during pregnancy clearer and more available. You and your provider should discuss the risks and benefits for you and your baby when considering a medication.

Over-the-counter medicines (OTCs) are the medicines you can buy without a prescription. OTC medicines often have pregnancy risks on the labels so study them closely. These were formulated by the FDA based on the risks they present during pregnancy. The most common reason for OTCs during pregnancy is pain. Of the many options for pain relief, only a few are considered safe.

You might not think of your coffee or Coke as a drug, but caffeine is a mild stimulant and passes easily through the placenta to your growing baby. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) recommends limiting caffeine consumption to less than 200 milligrams per day during pregnancy<sup>2</sup>. That's about 12 ounces of coffee – think a “tall” at Starbucks or a regular sized coffee mug. Higher daily caffeine intake is associated with increased risks for pregnancy loss and fetal growth issues.

## Prescription Drugs

A prescription medication is one that your provider orders or prescribes to treat a specific health condition. Some prescribed medications are not safe during pregnancy. If you are taking any prescription medication when you find out you're pregnant, be sure to tell your provider. You may need to stop or change prescriptions during pregnancy. Also, read the label on the prescription bottle. The side-effects a medicine may have on your baby can vary based on how much you take, when during your pregnancy you're taking it, and additional health conditions you may have. The risks can include miscarriage, stillbirth, pre-term birth, low birth weight, and various birth defects.<sup>3</sup>

## Prescription Drug Abuse (PDA)

Prescription drug abuse is the use of prescription medications – like pain relievers, stimulants, or sedatives – in a manner different than intended by the prescriber. This is unhealthy and potentially dangerous for anyone, but especially pregnant women. The negative effects vary by type of drug, but can increase risks of birth defects and other pregnancy complications. If you ever feel tempted to take a prescription drug that was not prescribed to you, or in a dose or way it was not prescribed, stop and talk to your provider to get help.

## Illicit Drugs<sup>4</sup>

Use of illicit drugs during pregnancy is unsafe for both mom and her baby. It doubles the risk of stillbirth and can cause premature birth, low birthweight, or various birth defects.

**Marijuana<sup>5</sup>** – Because smoking marijuana increases the level of carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide in the mother's blood, it reduces the oxygen supply to the baby. The FDA strongly advises pregnant or breastfeeding women to avoid using marijuana in any form, as well as products containing CBD (cannabidiol) or THC (tetrahydrocannabinol)<sup>6</sup> because of potential risks to the baby.

**Stimulants** – Stimulants speed up the body's systems – including heart rate, which can affect the blood and oxygen supply to the baby. Use of cocaine during pregnancy is associated with higher risks for maternal migraines and seizures and complications with high blood pressure, along with the other negative effects we already mentioned. Methamphetamine, another stimulant, can also cause issues with high blood pressure and complications in delivery.

## Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS)

Neonatal abstinence syndrome can occur when a newborn is regularly exposed to drugs – legal or illegal – in the womb. After birth, their supply of the drug stops suddenly, and they experience symptoms of withdrawal. Symptoms can vary based on the drug but can include tremors, high-pitched crying, restlessness, sleeping issues, stiffness, fever, and poor feeding.

Treatment for NAS<sup>7</sup> depends on the type and amount of drugs in the baby's system, and can include receiving IV fluids, feeding supplementation, and medicine. According to CDC research, children born with NAS are more likely to be diagnosed with a developmental delay or speech or language impairment<sup>8</sup>.

Many states now have laws addressing prenatal substance abuse. When a newborn tests positive for drugs, medical professionals may be required to report it to Child Protective Services (CPS), which can lead to an investigation.

Drug use during pregnancy is a complicated situation. So, let's review what you should do:

- 1) Talk to your provider about any and all medications or drugs you are taking.
- 2) Be informed: Read product labels, note side effects, and ask questions!
- 3) Consider alternatives: Explore options like gentle exercise, or safe remedies to treat illnesses or combat pregnancy symptoms.
- 4) Keep the long-term health of your baby in mind!

### Resources include:

- 1 Carroll, D., Carroll, D., Anderson, E., Carter, M., Clark, M., Flynn, E., Johnson, L., Holley, C., Morgan, M., O'bryan, S., Patel, H., & Smiley, J. (n.d.). Drugs in Pregnancy. [https://jfmo.cchs.ua.edu/files/2013/09/Drugs\\_Pregnancy.pdf](https://jfmo.cchs.ua.edu/files/2013/09/Drugs_Pregnancy.pdf)
- 2 Moderate Amounts of Caffeine Not Linked to Maternal Health Risks - Penn Medicine. (2021). [https://www.pennmedicine.org/news/news-releases/2021/november/moderate-amounts-of-caffeine-not-linked-to-maternal-health-risks#:~:text=The%20American%20College%20of%20Obstetricians,%20Dounce%20cups\)%20per%20day](https://www.pennmedicine.org/news/news-releases/2021/november/moderate-amounts-of-caffeine-not-linked-to-maternal-health-risks#:~:text=The%20American%20College%20of%20Obstetricians,%20Dounce%20cups)%20per%20day).
- 3 Prescription medicine during pregnancy. (2022). [www.marchofdimes.org](https://www.marchofdimes.org/find-support/topics/pregnancy/prescription-medicine-during-pregnancy). <https://www.marchofdimes.org/find-support/topics/pregnancy/prescription-medicine-during-pregnancy>
- 4 on, I. (2022, May 4). Substance Use While Pregnant and Breastfeeding | National Institute on Drug Abuse. National Institute on Drug Abuse. <https://nida.nih.gov/publications/research-reports/substance-use-in-women/substance-use-while-pregnant-breastfeeding#:~:text=Illegal%20Drugs,-Marijuana%20%28Cannabis%29>
- 5 editor. (2012, April 27). Using Illegal Drugs During Pregnancy. American Pregnancy Association. <https://americanpregnancy.org/healthy-pregnancy/pregnancy-health-wellness/illegal-drugs-during-pregnancy/>
- 6 editor. (2021, October 22). Is CBD Oil Safe During Pregnancy? American Pregnancy Association. <https://americanpregnancy.org/healthy-pregnancy/is-it-safe/cbd-oil-during-pregnancy/#:~:text=It%20states%20on%20it's%20website,products%20while%20pregnant%20or%20breastfeeding.%E2%80%9D>
- 7 Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome: Symptoms & Causes. (2022). Cleveland Clinic. <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/23226-neonatal-abstinence-syndrome#management-and-treatment>
- 8 CDC. (2018, August 30). Key Findings: Children Born with Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS) May Have Educational Disabilities. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/pregnancy/features/kf-nas-educational-disabilities.html>