

Breastfeeding and Potentially Harmful Substances

If you are breastfeeding, it is important to protect both you and your baby from any substance that puts either of you at risk for health problems. Before you use any prescription or other drug, or even an over-the-counter medicine, talk to your physician, pharmacist, or lactation consultant.

Mother's milk offers your baby both important short-term and long-term benefits. Breastfeeding is an important gift you can give your baby. Make sure you keep your baby safe from harmful drugs that could pass through your breast milk.

What substances can be harmful?

Substances that you might use in a social or other setting can be very harmful to you and your baby. These might include:

- Alcohol
- Cigarettes
- Opioid pain medicines (such as Percocet or OxyContin)
- Illegal "street" drugs such as marijuana, cocaine, methamphetamine ("meth"), ecstasy, or heroin

These substances change your moods and behaviors and can negatively affect your bodily functions as well as how aware you are of your surroundings.

What about marijuana?

Although several states have legalized marijuana for either medical or recreational use, women who are pregnant or breastfeeding should NOT use this drug. The active component of marijuana, THC (tetrahydrocannabinol), can pass from the mother to the baby during breastfeeding, which may potentially cause health and developmental problems. Marijuana may stay in your system for up to 30 days, exposing your baby to THC for extended periods.

Where can I learn more?

MotherToBaby helpline (Pregnancy Risk Line): 1-800-822-BABY (2229)

A Guide to Breastfeeding: Living and Learning Together booklet



Breastfeeding and Prescription Pain Medication fact sheet



Additionally, do NOT allow anyone to smoke marijuana around your baby as infants who inhale the smoke may suffer weakness or feeding problems. Some research tells us that infants exposed to marijuana may also develop behavior or attention problems (ADHD) later on.

What about other at-risk drugs?

The American Academy of Pediatrics and other medical professional organizations recommend that mothers who are breastfeeding should NOT use illicit "street" drugs. If you currently use these, talk to your doctor about adding maternal drug treatment or a maintenance program to your personal care plan. Mothers enrolled in these programs, even medicine-assisted programs, are encouraged to breastfeed.

Review any other substances you are taking with your physician, your baby's physician, or your lactation consultant to find out if your baby might be at risk.

