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 gives your baby important short-term and long-term benefits. Breastfeeding is an important gift for your baby. It is important to keep your baby safe from harmful drugs that could pass through your breast milk.

What substances can be harmful?

Substances that can be very harmful to you and your baby include:

- Alcohol
- Cigarettes, vapes
- Opioid pain medicines, such as lortab (Norco) or oxycodone,
- "Street" drugs such as marijuana, cocaine, methamphetamine ("meth"), ecstasy, or heroin

These substances change your moods and behaviors. They can negatively affect your bodily functions as well as your awareness of your surroundings and your baby's needs.

What about marijuana?

While marijuana use is now legal in many states for medical or recreational use, **you should NOT use it if you are pregnant or breastfeeding.** The active component of marijuana, THC (tetrahydrocannabinol), can pass from you to your baby during breastfeeding. THC is stored in your body fat and can pass into your breast milk at concentration levels 6 to 8 times higher than the levels found in your blood. THC may negatively affect your baby's brain development.

Pumping and dumping expressed breast milk after using marijuana is not recommended because marijuana may stay in your body as long as 30 to 90 days.

Where can I learn more?

MotherToBaby helpline (Pregnancy Risk Line) **800-822-BABY (2229)** or **mothertobaby.org**.

A Guide to Breastfeeding: Living and Learning Together booklet



Breastfeeding and Opioid Medicines fact sheet



Additionally, **do NOT allow anyone to smoke marijuana around your baby** as it increases the sisk of Sudden Infant Death Syndroms (SIDS).

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 a 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 doctor, your baby's doctor, or your lactation consultant to find out if your baby might be at risk.

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