

Substance use in pregnancy

This information sheet aims to answer some commonly asked questions about substance use during pregnancy.

IMPORTANT: This is general information only. Ask your doctor or midwife about what care is right for you.

What are substances?

Substances may be:

- prescribed by your doctor (such as medication for depression or anxiety)
- not prescribed (such as alcohol, amphetamines, cigarettes, cannabis, tobacco)
- natural or herbal products sold by a pharmacy, health food store or prescribed by a naturopath

What might happen to your baby if you use substances while pregnant?

It depends on the substances you use. Some substances can reduce the amount of oxygen and nutrients that your baby receives from the placenta. This may cause problems during pregnancy, at birth or sometimes they may show-up as a child or adult.

Some problems during pregnancy may include:

- miscarriage or stillbirth (baby dies before birth)
- placental abruption (placenta comes away from your uterus)
- preterm birth (baby born too early)
- prelabour rupture of membranes (waters around baby break too early)
- having a baby who has not grown as they should (low birth weight, smaller head and body length)

Taking substances may increase your baby's chance after birth of:

- getting infections
- dying from SIDS (sudden infant death syndrome)
- getting viruses such as hepatitis and HIV if you are sharing injecting equipment
- substance withdrawal after birth (neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS))
- not reaching their milestones

There are other parent information sheets about some of these concerns. Ask you your healthcare team or visit www.health.qld.gov.au/qcg

Should you avoid all substances when pregnant?

Some substances are safe to take in pregnancy, and some are not. It's best to avoid harmful substances during pregnancy. Some substances should not be stopped suddenly, so talk to your healthcare team about the safest way to manage this during pregnancy.

Services that your healthcare team may recommend to support you are:

- your GP
- your midwife
- drug and alcohol services
- community and government groups
- quit smoking programs

There may be other services in your local area.

Will you get pain relief in labour if you use harmful substances?

Yes, you are able to have pain relief in labour the same as any woman having a baby. All the options will be available to you such as heat packs, hot showers and moving around (to name a few).

Other pain relief that is available to you will be discussed during your pregnancy, so that you have a plan based on your individual circumstances.



Image: pregnant woman standing



Can you breastfeed?

Breastfeeding is generally safe (depending on the type of substance you use). It has long-term benefits for you and your baby. Talk with your healthcare provider about the type of support available for you.

Will your baby need extra care at birth?

The hospital where you give birth will support you and your baby staying together as much as possible. Sometimes if a baby has signs of substance withdrawal (NAS) they may need to go to the neonatal unit for additional monitoring and treatment.

What can you do to help your baby?

- talk to your healthcare providers openly and honestly about your substance use (both past and present)
- after discussing with your health care provider, consider quitting or reducing how much substance you use
- attend all of your antenatal appointments
- ask about the support services available
- take the supplements recommended by your healthcare team during pregnancy
- eat a variety of foods so that you and your baby receive the nutrition you both need
- think about options/preferences for feeding your baby and discuss this with your healthcare provider

When should you contact your healthcare provider?

If you feel you are not coping, or if you are worried about your baby or your own health. For example, if you:

- know or think you are pregnant
- want to stop using substances now that you are pregnant
- are on a methadone, subutex or suboxone program and feel like you are getting withdrawal symptoms
- have used substances before and feel like you want to start using again
- are experiencing symptoms of anxiety or depression and would like to discuss treatment options
- would like assistance for your partner, or those you live with, about substance use
- feel unsafe with your partner or are experiencing domestic violence
- feel unable to care for your baby

Support & Information

13HEALTH (13 432584) is a phone line that provides health information, referral and services to the public.

<https://www.qld.gov.au/health/contacts/advice/13health>

Child Health Service Provides newborn drop-in services, early feeding and support, child health clinics. Refer to <https://www.childrens.health.qld.gov.au/community-health/child-health-service> for your nearest service

Pregnancy, Birth & Baby Helpline (1800 882 436 - free call) offers free, confidential, professional information and counselling for women, their partners and families relating to issues of conception, pregnancy, birthing and postnatal care <https://www.health.gov.au/pregnancyhelpline>

Australian Breastfeeding Association (1800 686268) Community based self-help group offers information, counselling, and support services, on breastfeeding issues <https://www.breastfeeding.asn.au>

Women's Health Queensland (1800 017 676) is the website for *Women's Health Queensland Wide*, a health service where nurses and midwives can answer questions from women about their health <https://www.womenshealth.org.au>

Lifeline (13 11 14) Lifeline offers a telephone crisis support service to anyone <https://www.lifeline.org.au>

Queensland Drug and Alcohol Services provides information about staying healthy, substance use, and quit smoking resources <https://www.atods>

Queensland Network of Alcohol and Other Drug Services provides information and support for specific drug and alcohol issues and search function for assessment and treatment support for substance dependence through public health and community services <https://www.qnanda.org.au>

Quitline: 13 7848 (8am and 9pm, 7 days a week)

DVConnect Womensline: 1800 811 811 (24 hrs a day 7 days a week)

DVConnect Mensline: 1800 600 636 (9am – Midnight 7 days a week)

1800RESPECT: 1800 737 732 (24 hrs a day 7 days a week)

Queensland Domestic Violence and Family Support provides information and support for people affected by domestic and family violence <https://www.qld.gov.au/community/getting-support-health-social-issue/support-victims-abuse/domestic-family-violence>

Adis: 24/7 Alcohol and Drug Support provides free and confidential information, counselling, advice and referral options for people in Queensland with alcohol and other drug concerns, their families and health professionals. 1800 177 833 (free call) <http://www.adis.health.qld.gov.au>

Beyond Blue: 1300 224 636 provides mental health and wellbeing support <https://www.beyondblue.org.au>