

Using drugs in pregnancy

This information sheet aims to answer some frequently asked questions about drug use during pregnancy and after birth.

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

Are all drugs bad for you when you are pregnant?

Alcohol, tobacco and illegal drugs can harm your baby. So can some prescription drugs and some medicines sold in shops or by the chemist. Some herbal or 'natural' substances are also not good for unborn babies. Tell your doctor or midwife about **all** drugs and substances you use so you can get the right advice.

What happens if you use harmful drugs while pregnant?

Some harmful drugs or substances can stop your baby getting enough oxygen. Your baby might grow too slowly or not develop normally. Problems can also show-up later after they are born. It depends on the type of drug or substance you take. Harmful ones can also cause:

- miscarriage or stillbirth
- birth defects
- brain damage
- your placenta to come away from your uterus (placental abruption)
- being born too early (prematurity)

Harmful drugs or substances can increase your baby's chance of:

- getting infections
- dying from SIDS (sudden infant death syndrome)
- getting viruses such as hepatitis and HIV if you are sharing injecting equipment
- drug withdrawal after birth (**n**eonatal **a**bstinence **s**ndrome which is often shortened to just NAS)

There are other parent information sheets about some of these problems. Ask your doctor or midwife or visit www.health.qld.gov.au/qcg.

Available from www.health.qld.gov.au/qcg

Effective: July 2016

Review: July 2021

Doc No: C16.37-1-V1-R21

Should you stop using drugs?

The best thing is not to use or take harmful drugs or substances. Some drugs should not be stopped suddenly, so talk to your doctor or midwife about the safest way to stop.



Photograph of pregnant woman's belly and supportive hands

When should you contact your doctor or midwife?

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

- know or think you are pregnant
- are on a methadone or subutex program and feel like you are getting withdrawal symptoms
- feel like you want to use harmful drugs
- want to stop using
- feel unsafe with your partner or suffer domestic violence

What help is there during pregnancy?

Your doctor or midwife can help you find the support you (and your partner) need. This might be from:

- drug and alcohol services
- quit smoking programs (including getting nicotine replacement therapy)
- community and government groups to help you with housing, money trouble or other support and advice

What can you do to help your baby?

- talk to your doctor or midwife openly and honestly about your drug or substance use
- listen to their advice about quitting or stopping
- attend all your pregnancy appointments
- ask about the support and detox services available and ways to reduce your stress and anxiety
- see a dentist for a check-up and get any dental treatment you need
- take the vitamins recommended during pregnancy (e.g. multi-vitamins, folic acid, vitamin B12, vitamin D)
- eat a variety of foods so that you and your baby receive the nutrition you both need. Ask your doctor or midwife about services that can work with you to improve your diet

Will you get pain relief in labour?

Yes, you are able to have pain relief in labour the same as any woman having a baby. If you are using illegal drugs or are on a methadone or subtext program, go to hospital early in your labour. Ask your doctor or midwife about the type of pain relief that is right for you.

Can you breastfeed if you are using drugs?

Most of the time, breastfeeding is ok but it does depend on what drugs or substances you use. Drugs can pass into your breast milk and some can harm your baby. Your doctor or midwife will discuss breastfeeding and the drugs(s) or substances you use. It is better for your baby and for you if you breastfeed and stop using harmful drugs.

Support & information

13HEALTH (13 432 584): a phone service offering health information to the public

Pregnancy, Birth & Baby Helpline (1800 882 436): free, confidential, professional information and counselling for women, their partners and families about conception, pregnancy, birthing and postnatal care www.pregnancybirthbaby.org.au

Lifeline (13 11 14): a telephone crisis support service available to anyone www.lifeline.org.au

Quitline (13 78 48): provides tailored help and support for pregnant women and their partners to stop smoking

Australian Drug Foundation: information about drug use in pregnancy and lactation www.druginfo.adf.org.au

Foundation for alcohol research and education (FARE): information about drinking alcohol when pregnant or breastfeeding www.fare.org.au/women-want-to-know

Alcohol and drug information services (1800 177 833): for help if you or someone you know has problems with alcohol www.alcohol.gov.au

SIDS and Kids: information about safe sleeping and safe wrapping to help baby settle. Mobile apps available for download www.sidsandkids.org/safe-sleeping