

Breastfeeding and medications

This information sheet aims to answer some commonly asked questions about breastfeeding and medications. Informed consent and women centred care are integral to health care in Queensland. Decisions are always up to you.

IMPORTANT: This is general information only. Ask your doctor, midwife or nurse about your own situation.

Breastfeeding and breast milk

Breast milk is a complete food for your baby that supports normal growth and development. Our information sheet *Breastfeeding your baby* outlines the ways breastfeeding is good for both you and your child.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) (and others) recommend:

- first breastfeed within 1 hour of birth
- only breast milk for the first 6 months of life and
- introduce solid foods at 6 months and keep breastfeeding up to 2 years of age or beyond

When you need to take medication

Sometimes you might need to take medications while you are breastfeeding. Always check with your healthcare provider or pharmacist (no matter how old your child is) before you take a new medication. They can give you information that will help you make the best decisions for you and your child.



Image: baby breastfeeding

FACTS and MYTHS



FACT

Most medicines are safe while breastfeeding



FACT

Amounts in breastmilk are very small



MYTH

Always 'pump and dump' when taking medicine



MYTH

Don't take ANY medicine while breastfeeding

Do medications pass into breastmilk?

Most medication will pass into your breastmilk. Usually the amount is very small and there is little chance of harm to the healthy child. The amount in your milk depends on:

- the type of medicine you are taking
- how long it lasts in your body and
- how much you take (the medicine dose)

Should you stop breastfeeding?

You may have heard you need to 'express your milk and throw it away' ('pump and dump'). Or to feed your child formula milk instead. In most situations this is not necessary.

There are a few medications where breastfeeding at the same time is not recommended. So always talk with your healthcare provider or pharmacist.

You might also like to review the list of resources over the page for more information.







Is that medication safe for your child?

Each medicine is different. In most cases it is safe to keep breastfeeding your child. Usually, if the medication can be given to a baby who needs it, it is safe for you to take while breastfeeding.

If the medication is not safe to take while breastfeeding, they may be able to give you different medication that is safe to take while breastfeeding.

Tell your healthcare provider or pharmacist if your baby or child is small or unwell. Babies who are sick, very small or who are born early (premature) are more likely to be affected by medication in breastmilk.

What if you need pain relief?

	First choice paracetamol or a NSAID such as ibuprofen
	Avoid high dose opioids such as oxycodone, morphine
	Consider alternatives to codeine if possible
	Watch for side effects in baby (like drowsiness or poor feeding)

What if you need an anaesthetic or an operation?

If you need an anaesthetic or an operation let your healthcare provider know that you are breastfeeding before-hand.

As far as is known, anaesthetic medicines given at the usual dose, have not caused harm in healthy breastfed children.

You can start breastfeeding again after a general or regional anaesthetic as soon as you are ready.

What if you need antibiotics?

For most antibiotics, the amount passing to the baby is not likely to cause any harm. It is usually safe to keep breastfeeding.

Some possible side effects are diarrhoea vomiting, skin rashes or thrush. Most side effects are usually short-lived, and don't need any treatment.

If you are worried about any side effects, talk with your healthcare provider or pharmacist

Where can you get help?

Maternity hospitals offer help with breastfeeding. They can help you plan what to do before you go home as well as when you get home from hospital. They can help you find out about breastfeeding support in your community. You can also:

- visit a community midwife, child health nurse, lactation consultant (breastfeeding expert), pharmacist, or your general practitioner (GP)
- look at your baby's personal health record and Child Health Information booklet: *Your guide to the first 12 months*
- Look at the 'support and information' contacts below. These services offer help and advice.

Support & Information

Lactmed Online Database for Medicine and Lactation a free online database that provides information on drugs and lactation, aimed at health professionals and the breastfeeding mother. www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK501922/

Medicines Line (1300 633 424) telephone service providing consumers with information on prescription, over-the-counter and complementary (herbal, 'natural', vitamin and mineral) medicines. www.nps.org.au/medicines-line

Australian Breastfeeding Association (Freecall: 1800 686268) community based self-help group offering information, counselling and support services about breastfeeding www.breastfeeding.asn.au

Lactation Consultants of Australia and New Zealand (LCANZ) provides information on when and how to access a lactation consultant www.lcanz.org

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

Queensland Clinical Guidelines Parent information www.health.qld.gov.au/qcg