

In women who are pregnant, alcohol can cause:

- Damage to the baby at any month of pregnancy even before the woman knows she is pregnant. Even as little as one drink may affect the size, shape and function of the fetal cells
- Miscarriage
- Bleeding

The use of alcohol during pregnancy has potentially significant effects on the developing fetus. Studies have shown that alcohol might even affect the fetus as much as dangerous drugs such as cocaine and heroin.



In infants and children who were exposed during their mothers' pregnancy, alcohol can put them at higher risk for:

- FAS (Fetal Alcohol Syndrome), a set of mental and physical birth defects
- FASD (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders)
- Other birth defects and mental retardation
- Damage to brain, heart, kidneys, bones and joints
- Withdrawal at birth (baby may shake, be irritable, have a bloated abdomen and possible seizures)
- Prematurity or stillbirth
- Lifelong problems with behavior, learning, social skills, family relationships, speech/hearing/language, eating and sleeping patterns and transitions to adulthood

FAS and FASD are lifelong disabilities. Problems that parents face with their babies will also be problems as the babies grow into children, teenagers and adults.

Over-the-Counter and Prescription Drugs

If you are pregnant, do not take any medications before asking your health care provider or pharmacist.

Always tell your health care provider, dentist or pharmacist if you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant. Only take medications your health care provider tells you to take.

Certain groups of drugs can cause birth defects if taken during pregnancy. This list is not meant to scare you, but you need to know that some medicines can cause birth defects. THESE ARE NOT COMPLETE LISTS.

Some examples are listed below:

- Anti-acne drugs: *Accutane*
- Antibiotics (to treat infections)
- Anti-cancer drugs: *Methotrexate, Aminopterin*
- Anti-coagulants: *Coumadin, Warfarin*
- Anti-seizure drugs: *Dilantin, Valproic Acid, Trimethadione*
- Hormones: *DES*
- Thyroid drugs: *I-131, PTU*

In large doses, these medications can hurt your baby:

- Allergy medications
- Antacids
- Aspirin, ibuprofen, acetaminophen
- Cough syrups containing alcohol
- Cold medicine or cold pills
- Herbal remedies
- Laxatives
- Sleeping pills

If you are breastfeeding – do not take any medications before asking your health care provider or pharmacist.

Methamphetamine and Cocaine (Meth, Speed, Ice): Powerful Stimulants

Meth, crystal meth, and cocaine are stimulants that give a person a short-term “rush” or sense of euphoria. Meth is a chemical that stimulates or “speeds up” the brain, nervous system and the body. Stimulants can increase alertness, energy, confidence, and stamina. When the drugs wear off, they usually cause the user to feel depressed and tired.

What can meth and cocaine do?

In adults, using meth and cocaine can cause:

- Weight loss, even if not trying
- Heart attack, stroke, and seizures
- Sleeplessness
- Anxiety and fatigue
- Paranoia and hallucinations
- Mood swings/rage/violent behavior
- Skin sores/acne
- High blood pressure
- Greater risk of contracting HIV

- Tolerance, requiring higher doses to get the same effect
- Memory loss
- Brain cell damage
- Depression lasting for weeks, or years
- Tooth problems



In women who are pregnant, cocaine and meth can cause the user to:

- Have a miscarriage
- Bleed
- Have her baby too soon
- Have a stroke or bleeding in her brain
- Not have enough oxygen for her baby
- Have a fast heartbeat
- Die

In infants and children who were exposed during their mothers' pregnancy, cocaine and meth can put them at higher risk of:

- Low birth weight
- Growth problems
- Stroke or heart attack
- Breathing problems
- Seizures
- Going through withdrawal – (baby can be irritable, have a shrill cry, have feeding problems, and be restless)
- Small head and brain and body
- Possible birth defects (heart and brain)
- Poor coordination
- Learning and behavioral problems
- Developmental problems

Children as well as adults can be seriously burned in meth lab explosions.

It is likely these drugs will reach the baby through breast milk. Do not breastfeed if you use meth or cocaine.

Heroin: Narcotic

Heroin is a highly addictive narcotic that gives short-term feelings of well-being, pain relief and relaxation.

What can heroin do?

In adults, heroin can cause:

- A sense of euphoria and drowsiness
- Memory and attention problems
- Nausea and vomiting
- Risk of bacterial infections
- Risk of heart and lung complications

- Kidney and liver disease
- Risk of HIV, Hepatitis B and C
- Withdrawal (anxiety, irritability and itching)

In women who are pregnant, heroin can cause:

- A heartbeat that is too slow
- Breathing that is too slow
- Nausea and vomiting
- Death

If you continue to use heroin, do not breastfeed. If you are receiving treatment, talk to a health care provider before breastfeeding.

In infants and children who were exposed during their mothers' pregnancy, heroin can cause them to:

- Be born too early and too small
- Go through drug withdrawal (baby can be restless, have tremors and a high-pitched cry)
- Be at greater risk for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)
- Not eat or grow well
- Have developmental, learning and behavior problems



Children are more likely to use heroin when their friends and family do.



Alcohol will also decrease milk supply in breastfeeding mothers.

LSD, PCP: Hallucinogens

LSD and PCP are drugs that can temporarily change the user's sense of reality, mood and thinking.

What can LSD and PCP do?

In adults, LSD and PCP can cause:

- A change in the sense of time, color, sound, touch, and movement
- Fantasies, false impressions
- Uncontrolled emotions and violent actions
- Increased anxiety, depression, or flashbacks for days or months later

- Raised heart rate
- Raised blood pressure
- Uncoordinated movements
- Nausea/blurred vision/dizziness

In women who are pregnant, LSD and PCP can cause:

- Breathing that is too slow
- Miscarriage
- Problems with thinking clearly
- Rise in heart rate and rise in blood pressure

Do not breastfeed if you use these drugs.

In infants and children who were exposed during their mothers' pregnancy, LSD and PCP can cause them to have:

- Brain damage
- Birth defects such as a small head and problems with arms and legs
- Damage to the eyes and ears
- Withdrawal – baby can be irritable, agitated, jittery
- Crying spells when they are hard to comfort
- Slow growth
- Feeding problems
- Behavior problems and violent temper tantrums

Children are more likely to use these drugs when their friends and family do.

Marijuana: Hallucinogen

Marijuana is a drug that contains more than 400 chemicals and is smoked or mixed into foods or tea to make the user feel “high”.

What can marijuana do?

In adults, marijuana can cause:

- Cough, breathing problems, lung cancer
- Judgment and memory problems
- Rise in heart rate and blood pressure
- Desire to eat more

- Distorted sense of touch, time, sounds and sights
- Anxiety and paranoia
- Hallucinations and delusions

In women who are pregnant, marijuana can cause:

- Miscarriage
- Bleeding
- Not enough weight gain
- Premature labor and birth
- Shaking

In infants and children who were exposed during their mothers' pregnancy, marijuana can put them at higher risk for:

- Prematurity
- Low birth weight
- Birth defects
- Damage to heart and nervous system
- Breathing problems
- Going through drug withdrawal (baby may shake and be irritable)
- Not eating or growing well
- Seizures
- Infections
- Lifelong problems with behavior, learning and short attention span
- Childhood cancers

This handout was adapted from the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services handout.



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Substance Use: Risks To You and Your Family

Scan to access & learn more about local resources thru LinkU >



DC Department of Health
Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for
Women, Infants and Children (WIC)

Substance use can have a lasting effect on you and your family. Tobacco, alcohol and other drugs can harm you, as well as your unborn child. The harm does not end at birth. Substance use also has a lasting effect on your children.

When a parent or caregiver is under the influence, there is a greater chance of harm being done. When a child is around alcohol and drugs, the child is more likely to become a substance user or the victim of abuse.

This booklet looks at several different substances and how they affect adults, pregnant women, babies and young children. The effects result from the substance itself or from other factors related to substance use. Not all substances and not all effects of substance use are covered in this booklet. Talk to your health care provider if you have any questions.

Smoking: Tobacco and Nicotine

Nicotine is a very addictive drug found in tobacco leaves. Cigarette smoke contains nearly 4,000 chemicals, many of which cause cancer. Both direct and secondhand smoke are risks to you and your baby. Smoking and exposure to secondhand smoke can cause illness and death.

What can smoking do?

In adults, smoking can:

- Cause lung cancer
- Cause heart and lung disease
- Raise your heart rate and blood pressure
- Lower blood flow to your arms and legs
- Lower oxygen in your blood



In women who are pregnant, smoking can cause:

- Miscarriage
- The baby to grow too slowly
- Premature labor and birth
- Bleeding
- Death

In infants and children who were exposed during their mothers' pregnancy, smoking can raise the risk of:

- Premature birth
- Low birth weight
- Death
- Birth defects (cleft palate and heart defects)
- Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)
- Colds, asthma, pneumonia, and ear infections
- Lifelong disabilities (cerebral palsy and mental retardation)
- Slow growth
- Learning disabilities
- Lung cancer and heart disease
- Behavior problems

Children exposed to tobacco during their mothers' pregnancy are more than twice as likely to become regular smokers themselves later in life.

Exposure to secondhand smoke causes premature death and disease in children and adults who do not smoke. There is NO safe level of secondhand smoke.

Smoking can decrease a breastfeeding mother's milk supply.

Alcohol: Beer, Wine, and Hard Liquor

Alcohol is a drug that can have dangerous and life-threatening effects on both you and your baby. The alcohol content in a 12-oz beer is the same as that in 5-oz of wine and in 1-oz of hard liquor. Women should not drink if they are pregnant or might become pregnant, because there is no safe amount, no safe time, and no safe type of alcohol in pregnancy.

What can alcohol do?

In adults, alcohol can:

- Affect women's blood-alcohol levels more quickly even if they are drinking the same amount as men
- Put women at greater risk of liver disease even if they drink less than men and over a shorter time
- Act as a depressant
- Cause brain, heart, pancreas and kidney damage
- Cause eating problems