

Alcohol & Other Drug Use During Pregnancy

The use of alcohol and other drugs (AOD) during pregnancy is the leading preventable cause of mental, physical, and psychological impairments in infants and children. When a pregnant individual uses AOD, the substances pass to the fetus through the placenta, and breastfeeding passes AOD to infants through breast milk.

Alcohol

- Alcohol is one of the most dangerous drugs to use during pregnancy, as it is a [teratogen](#)--a substance that causes cell death and birth defects.
- Drinking during pregnancy increases the risk of [Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders](#) (FASD), whose effects range from abnormal facial features and other physical deformities to learning disabilities, hyperactivity and poor motor skills.
- It has [not been determined](#) that there is any safe level of alcohol use during pregnancy.



Marijuana

Marijuana is used more during pregnancy than any other drug except for alcohol, yet studies continue to show [negative health outcomes](#), which include:

- Higher rates of anemia for pregnant individuals
- Decreased infant birth weight & Apgar scores
- Higher likelihood of infant NICU admission
- Deficits in executive functioning as child develops

Breastfeeding while using marijuana transfers THC, the psychoactive chemical, to the infant. More research is needed about possible effects. Individuals are encouraged to avoid using marijuana while pregnant and breastfeeding.

Tobacco

- Smoking during pregnancy often causes the fetus to develop more slowly, resulting in babies with low birthweights. Low-birthweight babies are 20 times more likely to die in their first month of life than normal-weight babies.
- Risks of miscarriage and premature labor appear to be higher, and recent reports have also linked tobacco use with birth defects.

Opioids (Heroin, Prescription Painkillers)

- Nearly half of pregnant women abusing heroin, morphine and painkillers suffer from anemia, pneumonia, diabetes, hepatitis, and heart disease

- Individuals using opioids have more spontaneous abortions, premature births and still births
- Babies may be born dependent on the opioids—known as [neonatal abstinence syndrome](#)—which causes irritability, vomiting, diarrhea and hyperactive reflexes
- Pregnant women are generally referred to methadone treatment, as the withdrawal from stopping opiates can cause miscarriage.

Stimulants (Cocaine, Crack, Methamphetamine)

Stimulants cause increased heart rate and blood pressure. The added stress on the baby's system may cause slower growth, and pregnant individuals are more likely to experience bleeding, miscarriage, and [premature labor](#).

[Cocaine](#) and other stimulant use may also cause placental abruption, a condition where the placenta pulls away from the uterus before labor begins. This causes extensive bleeding and can be fatal for both mother and child. Babies who were regularly exposed to these drugs in the womb:

- Often have birth weights of 5 ½ pounds or less.
- Tend to have smaller heads, which generally indicates smaller brains.
- Face an increased risk of developmental disabilities and cerebral palsy.
- Are often jittery, irritable, and withdraw and cry when they are touched.
- Withdrawal symptoms suffered by infants born dependent on stimulants include tremors, sleeplessness, muscle spasms and sucking difficulties.

A parent's alcohol and other drug use can be harmful to a child even after she is born. Further contact with the drug occurs through breastfeeding.

If you're pregnant or breastfeeding and using alcohol or other drugs, help is available. Contact Compass Mark for confidential, non-judgmental support and information on treatment and recovery resources in [Lancaster](#), Lebanon & [Chester](#) Counties, PA.

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