



Not Using Drugs While Pregnant

What is prenatal drug exposure?



When a woman becomes pregnant, it is very important for her to lead a healthy life. This includes eating right, getting plenty of rest and exercise, and staying away from drugs, alcohol, and tobacco.

These substances may be harmful to the mother, and can also cause a difficult pregnancy. An unborn baby exposed to these substances may be born with a birth defect, or have developmental delays as a result of substance use during pregnancy.

An expectant mother should avoid all illegal substances — such as marijuana, cocaine, and methamphetamine. But she should also avoid legal substances, such as prescription drugs, over-the-counter medicines, and even supplements and herbal remedies. Of course, some medications are used to control life-threatening illnesses. An expectant mother should talk to her doctor about prescribed medications she is taking.

Babies that have been exposed to drugs, alcohol, or tobacco in the womb

may be born with low birth weight, asthma, attention-deficit disorder, sleeping and eating difficulties, birth defects, or certain developmental delays that could affect success in school.

The best thing an expectant mother can do for her baby is to stay away from all drugs, alcohol, and tobacco. Even having one or two drinks, or breathing second-hand smoke, can be harmful to an unborn baby. Using illegal drugs can cause serious problems, and the baby can be born addicted to the drug the mother used during pregnancy.

If you are pregnant, or planning to become pregnant, you should talk to your doctor about how to stop using substances that are harmful to your baby. If you are having trouble stopping, you should seek counseling, medical treatment, or a support group for help.

Ways to help your child:

ONE

If you are struggling to stop using alcohol, drugs, or tobacco while pregnant, help is available. Your doctor can prescribe medicine that will ease your withdrawal symptoms without harming your baby. You can also turn to a 12-step program such as Alcoholics Anonymous, for support.

TWO

Be honest with your doctor or obstetrician about your substance use. The more your doctor knows about your health history, the better. Rather than hiding this

information, be honest so your doctor can help you have the healthiest baby possible.

THREE

If your baby is born with substance use-related problems, work with your doctor to provide a safe, nurturing, healthy home for your baby.

FOUR

Remember that caring for a drug-exposed baby can be stressful. Get the help and support you need from local organizations, and do not be afraid to ask friends and family for help.

Resources:

Call [Early Access](#) at 1-888-IAKIDS1 if you have child development questions or concerns.

For help and support, visit the websites [Alcoholics Anonymous](#), [Narcotics Anonymous](#), or [Nicotine Anonymous](#) to find a support-group meeting in your area.

Visit [DrugFreeInfo](#), Iowa's free online substance abuse resource, or call (866) 242-4111.

The [Moms Off Meth](#) website helps moms that have lost custody, or are in danger of losing custody, to information and support in their area.

The [National Institute on Drug Abuse](#) website gives a short summary on the effects of legal and illegal substance use in pregnancy.

This factsheet is part of an informational series for parents of children ages 0-5, developed by the Iowa Department of Education Early Childhood Services Bureau. (Updated April 2010)

Three important facts about healthy pregnancy:

1. No amount of drugs, alcohol, or tobacco are safe for a baby. Just one or two drinks can affect a baby's development, and many drugs are known to cause developmental delays and birth defects.

2. Everything a pregnant mother takes in goes directly to the baby. Food and water are carried to the baby through the umbilical cord. Drugs and alcohol also reach the baby this

way, and can cause many problems.

3. Drug exposure affects unborn children in different ways. The results may be mild or severe, which is why it is important to not use at all. Heavy drug use can result in a baby that is born drug-addicted. Prenatal substance use can have long-lasting effects on a child's behavior, learning and growth.