Breastfeeding & Substance Use

An Information Guide for Parents and Caregivers

Many medications and substances pass easily into breastmilk, including those listed here. If you have specific questions, please speak with a healthcare provider.

This guide focuses on non-prescribed substances.

For prescription medications, please speak with your healthcare provider for advice related to your medications. Providing breastmilk is generally supported when prescription medications are used as directed by a healthcare provider. This includes prescribed medications for opioid use disorder, benzodiazepines for anxiety, stimulants for ADHD, and opioids for chronic pain.

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The following information applies to the use of non-prescribed substances.

If you need support decreasing or stopping use of any of these substances, talk to a healthcare provider. There are options for treatment that are safe when breastfeeding. This guide uses the words “breastfeeding” and “breastmilk” but the information applies to all types of human milk and chest feeding.

Alcohol: wine, beer, spirits/liquor

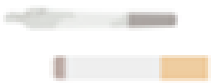
Effects on Babies:

- Baby may get less milk when feeding.
- Changes how milk tastes.
- Babies might eat less, be cranky, or sleep more.

What to Do:

- Alcohol goes into breast milk fast, so feed or pump milk before you drink.
- Wait 2 hours per drink before breastfeeding your baby.
- One drink means 5 ounces of wine, 12 ounces of beer, or 1.5 ounces of strong alcohol/spirits/liquor.

Tobacco (Nicotine): cigarettes, vaping, e-cigs, packets, chewing tobacco



Effects on Babies:

- Breastfeeding parent could make less milk.
- It changes what's in the milk and exposes baby to chemicals and heavy metals.
- It increases the risks of breathing problems like asthma

What to Do:

- If you can, use less or stop.
- Keep breastfeeding because breast milk is still good for your baby, even with nicotine.
- Don't smoke or vape near your baby because breathing in smoke can make sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) more likely.
- After smoking, change your shirt and wash your hands so the baby doesn't breathe in harmful chemicals from your clothes.

Cannabis: smoked/vaped cannabis (marijuana, weed, pot); oils with THC, dabs, and edibles

Effects on Babies:

- THC stays in fat cells, including in the breast, and goes into the milk.
- Babies might feel tired, have trouble eating, and not gain weight easily.
- It could affect how babies grow and develop.

What to Do:

- If you can, use less or stop.
- Keep breastfeeding because breast milk is still good for your baby, even with cannabis/THC.
- Don't smoke around your baby because breathing in smoke can make sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) more likely.

Opioids - Medicine: oxycodone, codeine, methadone, buprenorphine
- Drugs: heroin, fentanyl

Effects on Babies:

- Babies can be very sleepy, may eat less, breathe more slowly, pause their breathing (apnea), be cold or become constipated.
- Some opioids affect babies more as they are stronger, last longer or get into the milk more easily. Fentanyl is often mixed with other harmful substances (including Xylazine) that can pass into milk and can be present in your body for months.

What to Do:

- Do not breastfeed or give pumped milk to your baby for at least 24-48 hours. Wait longer for fentanyl.
- Ask a health care provider when it’s safe to breastfeed or give pumped milk.

Stimulants - Medicine: amphetamine, dextroamphetamine
- Drugs: speed, ecstasy, bath salts, cocaine, meth.

Effects on Babies:

- Different substances can affect babies in various ways and some can last for a long time.
- They might vomit, have diarrhea, feeding issues, lose weight, sleep poorly, be cranky, or even have seizures.

What to Do:

- Do not breastfeed or give pumped milk to your baby for at least 24-48 hours.
- Ask a health care provider when it's safe to breastfeed or give pumped milk.

Benzodiazepines: diazepam, lorazepam, clonazepam

Effects on Babies:

- Babies might be very sleepy, feed poorly, or gain weight slowly.
- Some benzodiazepines last longer and are more likely to cause symptoms in babies.

What to Do:

- Do not breastfeed or give pumped milk to your baby for at least 48 hours.
- Ask a health care provider when it's safe to breastfeed or give pumped milk.

THE University of Vermont Children's Hospital

Adapted from: Home | Academy of Perinatal Harm Reduction

UVMHealth.org/Childrens