



Drugs and Smoking During Pregnancy

April 2022

EXTENSION

Deana Hildebrand, PhD, RD, LD
Professor & Extension Specialist

Christine Walters, MS, RDN
MS Student in Nutritional Sciences

Tori Compton
Dietetic Intern, Extension Program Assistant

Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Fact Sheets
are also available on our website at:
extension.okstate.edu

You would not think of giving your baby a cigarette or drugs! Did you know that any substance you consume during pregnancy is shared with your growing baby? In fact, these substances can harm your unborn baby, and all should be avoided. The effects of drugs and smoking during pregnancy may cause your child to have developmental delays that don't show up until later in childhood.

Drugs

Drugs include medicine prescribed by your doctor and illegal drugs. Prescription and over-the-counter medicine include, but are not limited to, aspirin and cold medicines. They can harm your unborn baby if not used correctly. Effects differ according to the stage of pregnancy and the amount of drug used.

Early pregnancy is an especially critical period of development. Drugs taken during this time can be more harmful than when taken later in pregnancy. Ask your doctor about any medicine or drugs you are taking when you get pregnant. Always check with your doctor before taking any new medication.

Illegal drugs such as marijuana, heroin, cocaine, crack, and meth should never be taken. They can be extremely harmful to your unborn baby causing problems such as **birth defects, miscarriage, premature birth, and low birth weight**. Babies can be born addicted and must go through withdrawal. Mothers who inject drugs have a higher risk of getting HIV, which can be passed on to the baby.

Marijuana (Cannabis)

Even though using marijuana for medical reasons in Oklahoma has been legalized, there are NO medical reasons to use marijuana during pregnancy. The chemicals in marijuana can pass to your baby and harm your baby's development.

Using marijuana during pregnancy is NOT SAFE and can have many short-term and long-term harmful effects:

- Decreased birth weight
- Higher likelihood of being in intensive care
- Higher likelihood of stillbirth
- Shorter birth length
- Smaller head circumference
- Language, memory and reading deficits
- Attention problems
- Higher rates of depression
- Higher rates of substance

Smoking

Smoking tobacco, e-cigarettes/vaping, or marijuana while you are pregnant also increases the chances of your unborn baby developing health problems – much the same as using drugs. Choosing to smoke during and after pregnancy increases your baby's risk of:

- Being born too early
- Low birth weight
- Damage to developing lungs and brain
- Birth defects like cleft lip or cleft palate that require surgery
- Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)
- If you smoke, stop now to protect your baby. Also encourage other family members to not smoke around you or the baby

When you stop smoking:

- Baby will get more oxygen
- Baby will grow better
- Baby will be less likely to be born premature
- You will be able to breathe better and have more energy
- You are less likely to develop heart disease, stroke, lung cancer, lung disease and other diseases.

Getting help

Since nicotine and other types of drugs can be very addictive, you may need help to stop your drug use. Talk to your doctor or call the County Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse. Their counselors help people with drug and smoking problems. Support groups like Smoke-Enders, Smokers Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, or Pills Anonymous can help you. Look in the phone book or ask your doctor for phone numbers. For the health of your baby, get help NOW. Remember – the choices you make during pregnancy can last your baby's lifetime.

References

- Conner, S. N., Bedell, V., Lipsey, K., Macones, G. A., Cahill, A. G., & Tuuli, M. G. (2016). Maternal marijuana use and adverse neonatal outcomes. *Obstetrics & Gynecology*, 128(4), 713-723.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021, February 15). Smoking, Pregnancy, and Babies. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/campaign/tips/diseases/pregnancy.html>. Accessed June 2021.
- Fried, P. A., Watkinson, B., & Gray, R. (2003). Differential effects on cognitive functioning in 13-to 16-year-olds prenatally exposed to cigarettes and marijuana. *Neurotoxicology and teratology*, 25(4), 427-436.
- Gunn, J. K. L., Rosales, C. B., Center, K. E., Nuñez, A., Gibson, S. J., Christ, C., & Ehiri, J. E. (2016). Prenatal exposure to cannabis and maternal and child health outcomes: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *BMJ open*, 6(4), e009986.
- Ryan, S. A., Ammerman, S. D., & O'Connor, M. E. (2018). Marijuana use during pregnancy and breastfeeding: implications for neonatal and childhood outcomes. *Pediatrics*, 142(3), e20181889.
- The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. Marijuana Use During Pregnancy and Lactation. October 2017. Available at <https://www.acog.org/Clinical-Guidance-and-Publications/Committee-Opinions/Committee-on-Obstetric-Practice/Marijuana-Use-During-Pregnancy-and-Lactation>. Accessed June 2021.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Substance Use During Pregnancy. July 2020. Available at Substance Use During Pregnancy | CDC. Accessed June 2021.

Oklahoma State University, as an equal opportunity employer, complies with all applicable federal and state laws regarding non-discrimination and affirmative action. Oklahoma State University is committed to a policy of equal opportunity for all individuals and does not discriminate based on race, religion, age, sex, color, national origin, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity/ expression, disability, or veteran status with regard to employment, educational programs and activities, and/or admissions. For more information, visit <https://eeo.okstate.edu>.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Director of Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma. This publication is printed and issued by Oklahoma State University as authorized by the Vice President for Agricultural Programs and has been prepared and distributed at a cost of 40 cents per copy. 04/2022 KG.