



# Smoking/Alcohol/Illegal Drugs/Medication

## Smoking

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If you smoke, it is best to quit before or as soon as you know that you are pregnant.

The placenta (afterbirth) is the organ that connects the developing baby to you. Its job is to allow the passage of nutrients, oxygen, vitamins and other substances to pass from your blood to the baby. When you smoke, the chemicals from cigarettes are taken directly from your lungs, to your blood, to your baby's blood. Imagine how these chemicals affect the fragile tissues of your developing baby.

Cigarette smoke contains thousands of chemicals. It is not known or certain which of these chemicals are harmful to a developing baby. However, both Nicotine and Carbon Monoxide (the same gas released from a car's exhaust) are believed to play a role in causing bad pregnancy outcomes.

## Smoking During Pregnancy May Cause

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- Low birth weight: Low birth weight can be caused by prematurity (birth less than 37 weeks), poor growth, or a combination of both. Prematurity is increased in pregnant smokers and is the number one cause of neonatal death and chronic illness in babies. Problems such as cerebral palsy, life-long lung, kidney, or other organ problems, mental retardation and learning disabilities are much more common in premature and low birth weight babies.
- Vaginal Bleeding
- Preterm birth
- Stillbirth

The effects smoking has on your baby continue when you take him/her home. Children exposed to smoke in the home have higher levels of lung problems such as asthma, pneumonia, or bronchitis. They also suffer from more ear infections than children not exposed to smoke.

Even more troubling is the increased incidence of SUDDEN INFANT DEATH SYNDROME (SIDS) found in children exposed to smoking in the home. A child exposed to smoking in the home during the first few years of life are at an increased risk of developing asthma.

If a woman stops smoking by the end of her first trimester (first three months), she is NO more likely to have a low birth weight baby than a woman who never smoked. Even if a woman is not able to stop smoking during her first or second trimester, stopping during the third trimester (the last three months) can improve her baby's growth.

There are lots of ways to quit smoking and you may want to work with your health care provider to come up with a plan and a quit date. You can visit the Piedmont-Henry website for more information about the Piedmont Henry Hospital smoking cessation program.



# Smoking/Alcohol/Illegal Drugs/Medication

## Alcohol

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**There is NO "amount" of alcohol that is known to be safe during pregnancy and therefore it should be avoided.** There are NO "types" of drinks that are safe either. All forms of alcohol are dangerous to a fetus so whether it is one beer, one shot of liquor, one glass of wine or one mixed drink, they all have similar amounts of alcohol and can harm your fetus.

Drinking alcohol can cause birth defects, mental retardation and abnormal brain development. Alcohol is a leading cause of developmental disabilities in children. It also increases the chance of having a miscarriage or preterm baby. Continue to avoid alcohol while breastfeeding.

## Illegal Drugs

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Illegal drugs such as marijuana, cocaine, Ecstasy, methamphetamine, and heroin while you are pregnant can increase the risk of many serious problems. They cause preterm birth, affects the baby's growth, cause birth defects and can lead to learning and behavioral problems. It is hard to link a particular drug to a particular adverse outcome because often times in addition to the illegal drug there are other problems such as tobacco and alcohol use as well as poor nutrition which can also adversely affect a pregnancy. The bottom line is you should make all illegal drugs off limits while pregnant and if you are addicted to any of these drugs seek help immediately from a drug abuse program such as Narcotics Anonymous.

## Medications

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Medications can cross the placenta and enter the baby's bloodstream. In some cases medications can cause birth defects, addiction and other problems in the baby, therefore you need to be careful about the medications used during pregnancy.

Some medications are safe to use in pregnancy and with other medications the benefit of taking the medication outweigh the risk to the baby of not taking the prescribed medication. For example there are certain diseases that can be MORE harmful to your baby if not treated even if the medication used to treat the disease may not be recommended to be used during pregnancy. If you are on prescription medication, it is advisable that you discuss your medications with your doctor BEFORE becoming pregnant and certainly once you are pregnant to review your medications so that you can be prescribed safer medication alternatives for pregnancy if necessary.