



AMERICAN COLLEGE OF  
OBSTETRICIANS AND  
GYNECOLOGISTS

## Illegal Drugs and Pregnancy

When you are pregnant, anything you eat, drink or smoke can affect you and your fetus. It's wise not to use any medication (over-the-counter or prescription) or herbal product without your doctor's advice. Alcohol and tobacco also should not be used during pregnancy.

Use of illegal drugs can be harmful to the health of your baby.

### Drug Use and Pregnancy

Illegal drug use is widespread. As many as one in 10 babies may be born to women who use illegal drugs during their pregnancies. These substances can be harmful to the health and growth of your fetus during pregnancy.

### How Drugs Can Affect Your Baby

Your drug use can affect your baby both before and after birth. Most drugs reach the fetus by crossing the placenta. If you use drugs after your baby is born, they can be passed to him or her through your breast milk.

### How Drugs Can Affect You

Drug use may have long-term effects for your own health as well as your baby's. For instance, injecting drugs with needles that have been used by others increases your risk of getting hepatitis B virus or human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), the virus that causes acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).

## Types of Drugs

### Marijuana

Some studies have found that babies born to women who used marijuana while pregnant were smaller and, therefore, more likely to have health problems, than babies born to women who did not use marijuana.

### Cocaine

Cocaine, sometimes known as "crack," is a highly addictive drug.

A pregnant woman's cocaine use may cause the placenta to detach from the uterus too soon (placental abruption). This can cause problems, such as:

- Severe bleeding
- Preterm birth
- Fetal death
- Maternal death

Women who use cocaine have a 25 percent higher chance of having a preterm birth.

### Heroin

If heroin is used during pregnancy, it can cause:

- Preterm birth
- Fetal death
- Addiction in the fetus
- Stunted fetal growth

Studies of children of women who used heroin during pregnancy showed that some children were smaller, had

trouble thinking clearly, and had behavioral problems.

### **PCP, Ketamine and LSD**

Many PCP users become violent and out of control. Babies exposed to PCP during pregnancy may be smaller than normal, and have poor muscle control.

The effects of ketamine are like those of PCP. Babies exposed to ketamine during pregnancy may have behavioral or learning problems.

LSD users may have violent behavior and flashbacks. During pregnancy, use of LSD may lead to birth defects in the baby.

### **Glues and Solvents**

The sniffing of these fumes during pregnancy may cause birth defects in the baby, such as short height, low weight, small head, problems with joints and limbs, abnormal facial features, and heart defects.

### **Amphetamines**

Pregnant women who use amphetamines may not get enough nutrients for their growing fetus. Amphetamine use can cause placental abruption or even fetal death.

### **Ecstasy**

Many of the risks users face with ecstasy are like those found with the use of cocaine and amphetamines, including changes in mood, sleep problems and loss of appetite. If a pregnant woman takes ecstasy, her child may have long-term learning and memory problems.

### **Addiction**

Addiction begins when a person chooses to use drugs, but addiction is not just "a lot of drug use."

Even if you think you do not have a drug problem but sometimes use drugs, you still should quit. Any drug use can harm your fetus.

### **How Can I Get Help**

The groups listed below help people with drug abuse. If you or someone you know has a drug problem, seek help.

Narcotics Anonymous  
World Service Office in Los Angeles  
PO Box 9999  
Van Nuys, California 91409  
Telephone: (818) 773-9999  
Fax: (818) 700-0700  
Web site: [www.na.org](http://www.na.org)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration  
Center for Substance Abuse Treatment  
5600 Fishers Lane  
Rockville, Maryland 20857  
Telephone: 800-662-HELP  
Fax: (301) 443-8751  
Web site: [www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov](http://www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov)

### **Finally...**

When you use illegal drugs, so does your baby. Women who stop drug use during their pregnancies have healthier babies than those who do not.

*This excerpt from ACOG's Patient Education Pamphlet is provided for your information. It is not medical advice and should not be relied upon as a substitute for visiting your doctor. If you need medical care, have any questions, or wish to receive the full text of this Patient Education Pamphlet, please contact your obstetrician-*

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