



Drugs/Alcohol & Pregnancy

We're not sure where it started but the myth about an occasional glass of wine or a beer being approved, even recommended by doctors for pregnant women has spread everywhere. We want to make sure you get the facts.

There is no safe amount of alcohol for a pregnant woman.

Everything you drink goes into your bloodstream and passes to your baby. Children whose mothers drink alcohol can be born small. They can have trouble eating and sleeping. They can have problems learning and paying attention. Some may even need lifelong medical care. It's the same risk for all mothers and fathers-to-be.

Alcohol, like carbon monoxide from cigarettes, passes easily through the placenta from the mother's bloodstream into her baby's blood. The blood alcohol level of the fetus becomes equal to or greater than the blood alcohol level of the mother. Because the fetus cannot break down alcohol the way an adult can, its blood alcohol level remains high for a longer period of time.

Defects caused by prenatal exposure to alcohol have been identified in virtually every part of the body, including the brain, face, eyes, ears, heart, kidneys and bones. No single factor can account for all the problems that alcohol causes unborn babies. Women who are nursing should also not drink. Alcohol can pass through breast milk to the baby. No amount of alcohol is safe during pregnancy or nursing.

The best time to stop drinking is when you decide to get pregnant. If you're already pregnant and stop now, you can still help your baby.

The same, of course, is true for drugs, especially illegal or "street" drugs such as marijuana. Some studies suggest that the use of marijuana during pregnancy may slow the growth and development of the fetus and sometimes result in premature birth. Some babies who were regularly exposed to marijuana before birth appear to go through withdrawal-like symptoms including excessive crying and trembling.

The use of amphetamines also known as "speed," "crank," "crystal meth" or "ice" by pregnant women has been shown to dramatically increase the likelihood of low birth weight babies. Other studies have linked the use of these drugs in pregnant women with heart defects and cleft lip/palate. After delivery, babies exposed to amphetamines also appeared to go through withdrawal-like symptoms like difficulty breathing and drowsiness.

For more information about the effects of drugs and alcohol on pregnant women visit our website, www.welcomeverybaby.org or www.bienvenidobebe.org.