

It is important to discuss all medications, both prescribed and over the counter, with your doctor during pregnancy and breastfeeding.



Alcohol use

- No amount of alcohol use during pregnancy or while trying to get pregnant is safe
- All types of alcohol are equally harmful, including all wines and beer
- The baby's brain is developing throughout pregnancy and even small amounts of alcohol can result in Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD), which are brain disorders related to alcohol use
- The effects of alcohol can last throughout your baby's life, causing difficulties with motor coordination, emotional control, schoolwork, socialization and holding a job



Tobacco use

- Smoking may have an impact on fertility
- Nicotine causes blood vessels to narrow, so less oxygen and fewer nutrients reach your baby
- Nicotine also damages a baby's brain and lungs – this damage is permanent
- There is a greater risk of stillbirth, with the highest risk found among the heaviest smokers

E-cigarettes contain harmful nicotine and are not safe substitutes for cigarettes and should not be used during pregnancy.



What about secondhand smoke?

- Secondhand smoke can increase the risk of having a low birth weight baby – a low birth weight puts the baby at risk for poor health later in life
- Babies who are exposed to secondhand smoke have an increased risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)
- Babies who are exposed to secondhand smoke are more likely to have asthma attacks and ear infections
- There is a 2.1 times greater risk of stillbirth when you are exposed to secondhand smoke



Opioid use

- Opioids are a type of medication that relieves pain and include oxycodone, hydromorphone, hydrocodone and codeine
- You and your doctor should discuss the risks and benefits of opioid medications prior to and during pregnancy and after childbirth
- When taken under a doctor's care, opioids are safe for both you and your baby
- It is important to take the medication only as prescribed

CAUTION

When you are pregnant and have an opioid addiction, you should not suddenly stop using the drug without medical supervision. Withdrawal, especially when done abruptly, often leads to relapse, which can be harmful for you and your baby.



Illegal drug use

- Illegal drugs or misuse of prescription drugs can interfere with the growth of the baby and cause birth defects, preterm birth and miscarriage
- Babies can become addicted to cocaine, heroin, methamphetamines and other drugs
- If born addicted, the type and severity of your baby's withdrawal symptoms depend on the drug(s) used, how long and how often you used the drugs, how your body breaks the drug down, and whether the baby was born full term or prematurely



What about marijuana?

- The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recommends against using marijuana while trying to get pregnant, during pregnancy and while you are breastfeeding
- Smoking marijuana might increase the levels of carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide in the blood, which may reduce the oxygen supply to your baby
- There is an increased risk of your baby having a low birth weight when you smoke marijuana

Where can I get help to reduce or stop using tobacco, alcohol, illegal drugs or prescription medication(s)?

There are many beneficial treatments available for service members and their family members. Talk with your obstetrician or other health care provider about what treatment options are available and what will be most helpful for you and your baby.

The treatment that is best for you depends on the substance you are using, your personal characteristics and your preferences.

References

- 1 Management of Pregnancy Work Group. Department of Veterans Affairs & Department of Defense. (2018). VA/DoD Clinical Practice Guideline for the Management of Pregnancy. Version 3.0. Retrieved from <https://www.healthquality.va.gov/guidelines/WH/up/>
- 2 Management of Substance Use Disorders Work Group. Department of Veterans Affairs & Department of Defense. (2015). VA/DoD Clinical Practice Guideline for the Management of Substance Use Disorders. Version 3.0. Retrieved from <https://www.healthquality.va.gov/guidelines/MH/sud/>
- 3 Management of Opioids for Chronic Pain Work Group. Department of Veterans Affairs & Department of Defense. (2017). VA/DoD Clinical Practice Guideline for the Management of Chronic Pain. Version 3.0. Retrieved from <https://www.healthquality.va.gov/guidelines/Pain/cot/VADoDOTCPG022717.pdf>
- 4 American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. Tobacco, Alcohol, Drugs and Pregnancy Frequently Asked Questions. (2017). Retrieved from: <https://www.acog.org/Patients/FAQs/Tobacco-Alcohol-Drugs-and-Pregnancy>
- 5 National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Fetal Alcohol Exposure Fact Sheet. (2015). Retrieved from <https://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/FASDFactsheet/FASD.pdf>
- 6 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities. (2018). Alcohol Use in Pregnancy. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/fasd/alcohol-use.html>

DoD/VA Resources

The Purple Book

A complete guide to pregnancy in the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense
<https://www.qmo.amedd.army.mil/pregnancy/PurpleBook.pdf>

Military OneSource

Provides 24/7 support and information on housing, financial, legal, medical and psychological services
Stateside 800-342-9647
Overseas 800-3429-6477
or collect 484-530-5908
www.militaryonesource.mil

My HealtheVet

An online system for Veterans to manage and track their health care
www.myhealth.va.gov

Psychological Health Center of Excellence

Provides policies and evidence-based information and resources on psychological health
<http://www.pdhealth.mil/resource-center>

External Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Provides current evidence-based medical recommendations
<https://www.cdc.gov/pregnancy/index.html>

National Institute on Drug Abuse

Provides research and resources on the causes and consequences of drug use and addiction
www.drugabuse.gov

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

Provides information on treatment for alcohol addiction and fetal alcohol exposure
www.niaaa.nih.gov

Clinical Guidance for Treating Pregnant and Parenting Women With Opioid Use Disorder and Their Infants

This guide provides national guidance for the management of pregnant and parenting women with opioid use disorder
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration HHS Publication No. (SMA) 18-5054. Rockville, MD. 2018.
www.samhsa.gov

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

Provides medical information on tobacco, alcohol, drugs and pregnancy
<https://www.acog.org/Patients>

The guideline is available at <https://www.healthquality.va.gov>. Army, Navy and Air Force facilities can order copies of this brochure and guideline at <https://www.qmo.amedd.army.mil>



PUIID 4840
Updated September 2018 by the Psychological Health Center of Excellence (PHCoE)

Is Your Body Ready for Pregnancy?

Pregnancy and Substance Use: It's Not Worth the Risk

Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense employees who use this information are responsible for considering all applicable regulations and policies throughout the course of care.