

We've all heard the old saying that there's no such thing as being a little bit pregnant. You either are or you aren't. There's no middle ground, no gray areas.

The same thing applies to being careful during pregnancy. You either put your commitment where your heart is or you put your baby in at least some degree of risk.

If you're pregnant and you drink, *stop right now*. There's no better way of reducing the risk to your baby.

If you smoke or drink a lot of caffeine, cut your use *way* back—if you don't cut it out altogether.

Because of all the ways you'll ever be able to show your love for the little person growing inside you, the best place to start is to give him or her a fair chance at life from the very beginning.

It's the most powerful form of love there is because it's pure love in action.

Your mom gave it to you. Now it's your turn to pass it on to the next generation, baby. ■



Starting points



This is one in a series of publications on drugs, behavior and health published by Do It Now Foundation. Please call or write for a list of current titles—or visit our web site at [www.doitnow.org](http://www.doitnow.org).



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# 'everyday' drugs & pregnancy

## How alcohol, tobacco & caffeine can affect the (all-new) two of you



■ A Do It Now Foundation Publication by Jennifer James

"A baby is God's opinion that the world should go on."

—Carl Sandburg

Babytalk

If Sandburg was right, then the woman who doesn't smoke or drink while she's pregnant must be God's opinion that the world should go on *better* than before.

That's one way, at least, of looking at the mounting body of research into the effects of these common, so-called "everyday" drugs on pregnancy—and the health and well-being of both babies- and moms-to-be.

Because in recent years, researchers from around the world have built a solid case against the use of both alcohol and tobacco during pregnancy. And many have even begun to question the value (and examine the potential risks) of that All-American stimulant, caffeine.



*Start smart. Pregnancy can be a 9-month hassle with old habits, or a fresh start—for both of you.*

In the process, they've linked a lengthening list of possible problems to their use during pregnancy — problems ranging from discomfort and distress in the mother to mental retardation and other birth defects in the infant.

That's why we've put together this pamphlet: to give you the opportunity, if you're pregnant (or planning to be), to consider how drugs that might not seem *that big a deal* can have a **big** impact on both you and your developing baby.

We hope you'll stick around, and hope you learn something.

But more importantly, we hope that you *act*, if you need to, and make some of the lifestyle changes we'll suggest.

Because we already know that you want to have a healthy baby.

The trick is for you to *do* something about it—and to keep on doing it.



*Pregnant pause. Even before you start to "show," it's time to start showing how much you care.*

We know you want to have a healthy baby. The trick is for you to do something about it.



Critical factors

Think you're *eating* for two these days? You're doing more than that. You're sharing everything from air to emotions with the person-in-progress down there.

That's because a developing fetus really *is* a part of its mother, sharing oxygen and nutrients through the umbilical cord and across the *placenta*.

The placenta was once thought to be a natural filter, shielding the fetus from external harm. Today, we know that virtually everything in a woman's bloodstream passes through to the fetus.

And that's where the problems start.

Since a fetus can't remove harmful substances on its own, all the drugs a woman uses during pregnancy stay in its body longer than they do in mom's—and at higher, more toxic levels.

The problems that can result depend on how pregnant mom is.

During the first months of pregnancy, when the fetal heart, brain, and other organs are forming, drinking or drug use can cause birth defects.

In later months, it's can slow growth and contribute to learning and behavior problems in newborns, or even full-blown addiction.

That's why it's important to get yourself drug-free (if you're not already) as soon as you find out you're pregnant — and keep yourself that way throughout

your pregnancy.

Because the risk to the fetus never really goes away. It

just changes, that's all.

Some of the problems that never go away start when a pregnant woman drinks.

*What* she drinks isn't important, because any alcoholic drink—beer, wine, or a rum punch with a little bamboo umbrella on the side—contains roughly the same amount of pure alcohol, about half an ounce.

How *much* she drinks does matter, though. At high doses, alcohol can kill a fetus—and its mom. Still, alcohol poisoning doesn't happen that often. Much more common is *Fetal Alcohol Syndrome*, or FAS.

FAS is a set of birth defects directly linked to alcohol use during pregnancy. Main symptoms include reduced growth, face and head malformations, organ defects, and mental retardation.

According to a recent estimate, FAS occurs in about two of every 1,000 live births in America today. Among women who drink five or more drinks a day, FAS rates may top 25 cases for every 1,000 live births.

But simply cutting down on drinking doesn't cut it either when it comes to reducing risk, because for every child with full-blown FAS, 10 others suffer less severe, but no less real, "Fetal Alcohol Effects."

Even moderate drinking *could* lead to trouble.

## Alcohol

### ► Breaktime: Just Undo It

■ **Bottoms Up!** If you're stressed and feel the urge to merge with a Margarita (or even a Pink Lady), chill out with a glass of juice or ice water instead.



■ **Caffeine fiend?** If you get the sleep you need (and you **do** need more, these days), you'll find you need caffeine a lot less.



■ **Smoke alarms.** The secret to getting past smoking is to keep smoking a part of your past. Remember: The longer you hold out, the easier it gets.



*Simple logic. Make healthy choices that are good for you, and you'll be making choices that are best for your baby.*

It's linked to reduced fetal growth and an increased risk of behavioral disorders and "subnormal" IQ scores. And today, researchers even warn that as few as one or two drinks a week could cause an increased risk of miscarriage and stillbirth.

So how much alcohol is safe? None—because according to the U.S. Surgeon General's Office, there's simply no safe dose of alcohol for a pregnant woman.

Need any other reason to stop drinking now?

**Tobacco** Smoking poses a different set of problems but the same sort of risks. That's why doctors think it's so vital for pregnant women to stop smoking.

A main reason is the "dirtiness" of tobacco smoke: It contains about 4,000 different chemicals, including heavy metals, tars, gases, and even radioactive materials.

Two of the best-known chemicals in cigarette smoke are *nicotine* and *carbon monoxide*. Both reduce oxygen flow to the fetus, while nicotine speeds up heart-beat and increases blood pressure in the fetus.

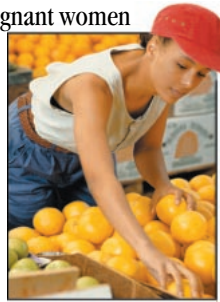
Main risks of smoking during pregnancy include:

■ **Delayed Growth.** The more a woman smokes, the less her baby grows. Twice as many babies weighing less than 5 pounds are born to smokers as to nonsmokers.

■ **Premature Birth.** Pregnant smokers are more likely to suffer bleeding, damage to the placenta, and other problems that trigger early birth.

■ **Infant Death.** Smoking is a direct cause of miscarriage, stillbirth, and sudden infant death syndrome (crib death). Some experts say infant death rates rise by 20-35 percent among smoking mothers.

■ **Childhood Disease.** Many researchers think that childhood leukemia and other cancers can be traced to tobacco exposure before birth.



*Food for thought. The best gift you'll ever give your baby may be the dietary and lifestyle changes you make right now.*

**W**hen it comes to babies, 'normal' doesn't mean 'average.' It means 'perfect,' in every way.



Still, there's good news amid the smoking-related gloom. Experts think that most serious damage occurs between the fifth and eighth months of pregnancy. That means if you stop smoking early, risks drop back to normal.

And when it comes to babies, "normal" doesn't mean "average." It means "perfect," in every way.

Caffeine is the most popular "everyday" drug in America. It plays a main role in many of our favorite drinks—from coffee and tea to diet cherry colas—and stars in a number of over-the-counter medicines as well.

Still, just because caffeine is everywhere doesn't mean it's safe—especially for people who haven't been born yet.

## Caffeine

In fact, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration pulled caffeine from its "safe additives" list when studies linked it to miscarriage, heart defects, and slow fetal growth.

Today, the FDA advises pregnant women to limit their use of caffeinated drinks and other caffeine-containing products.

We'll even throw one more scrap onto the pile of arguments against the drug.

Try this on, to see if it fits: Since caffeine is a stimulant, it can cause insomnia, irritability, and tension.

And even though they're not necessarily harmful, these effects *can* make pregnancy less comfortable than it could be.

And pregnancy is one of the times when we all want all the comfort we can get.

### ■ Operation Detox: Everyday Alternatives

**h**ey, you might as well face it. Pregnant or not, quitting a habit can be tough once you've organized your life around it. Luckily, though, it doesn't take that long to beat most "everyday" drug habits.

And there are *dozens* of ways to wake up or wind down without relying on alcohol, tobacco, or caffeine to do it for you.

Here are a few guaranteed-safe ways to help ease the transition:

► **Deep Relaxation.** Wind down with a warm bath instead of a glass of wine or a cocktail. Light stretching, a back rub, or a few minutes of meditation can also help.

► **De-Stress.** Stress is the reason most smokers give for failing to stay tobacco-free. If stress is your smoking "trigger," find another way to defuse it—taking deep breaths or a half-hour nap, for instance. Avoid using nicotine gum or patches, though. They can reduce oxygen supplies to that work-in-progress you're carrying around down there.

► **Decaffeinate.** Energy comes in a lot of flavors besides mocha mint or orange capuccino. A shower, a glass of juice, or even a walk around the block provide their own forms of instant energy. And if you still crave a cup of something *scalding* in the morning, try herbal tea with lemon and honey. You'll *both* be better for it. ■

