

Pregnancy: How Drug and Alcohol Use Hurts Your Baby



When you are pregnant, everything you eat, drink, or take into your body may affect your unborn baby. So try to eat healthy foods and drink lots of water while you are pregnant.

Do not drink alcohol, use illegal drugs, or abuse prescription or over-the-counter medicines. Even a little alcohol or drug use can hurt your baby and cause problems that can last for his or her entire life. Smoking also can slow your baby's growth.

If you are not pregnant but are thinking about getting pregnant, stop smoking and drinking alcohol. Don't use illegal drugs or abuse prescription or over-the-counter medicines. You may not know when you become pregnant.

What are some tips for a healthy pregnancy?

- Stop drinking alcohol, using illegal drugs, or abusing prescription or over-the-counter medicines. Tell your doctor if you need help to quit. Counseling, support groups, and sometimes medicines can help you stay sober or off drugs.
- If you have a history of problems with quitting drugs or alcohol, tell your doctor. A person who drinks or uses drugs most of the day, starting in the morning, for example, may need medical help to quit safely.
 - Do not smoke or allow others to smoke around you. If you need help quitting, talk to your doctor about stop-smoking programs and medicines. These can increase your chances of quitting for good.
 - Eat a variety of foods to get all the nutrients you need.
 - Drink lots of water every day. This can help reduce premature contractions.
 - Take a daily vitamin that has folic acid. A vitamin meant for pregnant women can help prevent birth defects.
 - Increase the calcium in your diet. Try to drink a quart of skim milk each day. You also may take calcium supplements and choose foods such as cheese and yogurt.
 - Limit the amount of caffeine you get. Coffee, tea, cola, and chocolate all have caffeine.
 - Get regular exercise during pregnancy. Try to do at least 2½ hours a week of moderate exercise. One way to do this is to be active 30 minutes a day, at least 5 days a week. It's fine to be active in blocks of 10 minutes or more throughout your day and week. Brisk walking and swimming are good exercises during pregnancy.
 - Use acetaminophen (Tylenol) to relieve minor problems, such as a mild headache or backache or a mild fever with cold symptoms. Do not use nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as any type of aspirin product, ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), or naproxen (Aleve), unless your

doctor says it is okay. Do not take any other medicine unless your doctor says it is okay.

When should you call for help?

Call 911 anytime you think you may need emergency care. For example, call if:

- You passed out (lost consciousness).
- You drank alcohol, used illegal drugs, or abused prescription or over-the-counter medicines and are having thoughts of hurting yourself or others.
- You have serious withdrawal symptoms, such as confusion and severe trembling.
- Someone you are with has symptoms of alcohol poisoning, such as a loss of consciousness or trouble breathing.

Call your doctor now or seek medical care right away if:

- You have blackouts, which are times when you are awake but forget what occurs while drinking. This is not the same as passing out.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- You drink alcohol, use illegal drugs, or abuse prescription or over-the-counter medicines again.
- You want advice on counseling or support groups.
- You need help stopping your drinking or drug use.
- You have any problems with your medicine.