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## Alcohol or Drug Use During Pregnancy

### British Columbia Specific Information

When you are pregnant, or planning to become pregnant, the safest option is to not drink alcohol at all. Drinking alcohol during your pregnancy puts your baby at risk of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). FASD is the leading known cause of developmental disabilities in children. Taking drugs during pregnancy or while breastfeeding may also harm your baby. This includes prohibited drugs but could also include the misuse of prescribed or over the counter drugs.

For more information about FASD, substance use during pregnancy and while breastfeeding, and where to find support, see [Alcohol and Other Drug Use During Pregnancy](#) or speak to your health care provider.

### Topic Overview

During pregnancy, everything you eat, drink, or take into your body affects you and your growing baby ([fetus](#)). Pregnant women often need to make changes to have a healthy pregnancy, such as eating better or exercising. But one of the most important things you can do when you are pregnant is to avoid alcohol and drugs.

Alcohol and drugs can cause problems for you during your pregnancy and when it is time for your baby to be born. They can also affect your baby both before and after he or she is born. They can:

- Affect your baby's size.
- Affect how your baby's heart, lungs, and brain work.
- Cause lifelong learning, emotional, and physical problems for your child.

Using alcohol and drugs like cocaine or meth is not safe for you or your baby.

The best time to stop using alcohol and drugs is before you get pregnant. But sometimes pregnancy is unexpected. Since drugs and alcohol can harm your baby in the first weeks of pregnancy, the sooner you can stop, the better.

Even some [over-the-counter](#) and prescription medicines aren't safe to take when you're pregnant. Tell your doctor about all the drugs and natural health products you take. He or she can help you decide what medicines are safe to take during pregnancy.

### How do alcohol and drugs affect pregnancy?

Substance	Possible effect on mother	Possible effect on fetus, newborn, and child
Alcohol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Lack of certain vitamins</li> <li>■ Miscarriage</li> <li>■ Stillbirth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Low birth weight</li> <li>■ Intellectual disability</li> <li>■ Heart problems</li> <li>■ Learning and behaviour problems</li> <li>■ Fetal alcohol syndrome</li> </ul>
Cocaine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Seizures</li> <li>■ Hallucinations</li> <li>■ Fluid in the lungs (pulmonary edema)</li> <li>■ Breathing problems</li> <li>■ Heart problems</li> <li>■ Abruptio placenta</li> <li>■ Miscarriage</li> <li>■ Stillbirth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Low Apgar score</li> <li>■ Stroke</li> <li>■ Deformed reproductive or urinary organs</li> <li>■ Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)</li> </ul>
Ecstasy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Effects not known</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Long-term memory problems</li> <li>■ Learning problems</li> </ul>
Heroin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Pre-eclampsia</li> <li>■ Bleeding in the third trimester</li> <li>■ Abruptio placenta</li> <li>■ Breech birth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Seizures</li> <li>■ Addiction, withdrawal symptoms after birth</li> <li>■ Breathing problems</li> <li>■ Small size at birth</li> <li>■ Physical and mental development problems</li> </ul>
Inhalants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Life-threatening breathing problems</li> <li>■ Convulsions or seizures</li> <li>■ Coma</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Low birth weight</li> <li>■ Problems with how bones form</li> <li>■ Learning problems</li> </ul>
Cannabis (marijuana)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Preterm labour</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Tremors</li> <li>■ Easily startled</li> <li>■ Cranky or fussy</li> <li>■ Learning problems</li> <li>■ Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder</li> <li>■ Depression</li> <li>■ Substance misuse</li> <li>■ Leukemia</li> <li>■ Certain types of cancer</li> </ul>

Methamphetamine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Stroke</li> <li>■ Brain damage</li> <li>■ Miscarriage</li> <li>■ Abruption placenta</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Low birth weight</li> <li>■ Heart and lung problems</li> </ul>
PCP/LSD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Confusion</li> <li>■ Delusions</li> <li>■ Hallucinations</li> <li>■ Risk of overdose</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Withdrawal symptoms after birth</li> <li>■ Learning problems</li> <li>■ Emotional problems</li> <li>■ Behaviour problems</li> </ul>

## Alcohol or drug misuse: How to stop

You may already know that alcohol and drugs can harm you and your baby. But it can still be hard to stop. Changing your behaviours isn't easy. Some people need treatment to help them quit using drugs or alcohol. Here are some things you can do:

**Take the first step.** Admitting that you need help can be hard. You may feel ashamed or have doubts about whether you can quit. But your treatment can be successful only if you make the choice to stay sober. Remember that many people have struggled with these same feelings and have recovered from substance use problems. Quitting now will help you and your baby.

**Tell someone.** If you can't stop drinking or using drugs on your own, tell someone that you need help. There are people and programs to help you. Your doctor is a good place to start. He or she can talk to you about treatment options. Your doctor may be able to give you medicines that can ease withdrawal symptoms. Or he or she may be able to find a hospital or clinic that you can go to for treatment.

You might also want to tell a friend or loved one. Having someone on your side that you know well, telling you that you can do this for yourself and your baby, is a very important part of recovery.

**Make changes to your life.** It can be hard to stop using alcohol or drugs when it has become a part of your life. You may need to make changes to your routine, like not being around certain people, or not going to places where you used to drink or use drugs. Ask friends and family to support your changes.

**Consider counselling.** Counselling helps you make changes in your life so you can stay sober. You learn to cope with tough emotions and make good choices. You may get counselling in a group or one-on-one.

**Join a support group.** Groups like Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous were formed to help people who want to stop doing things that add no value to their lives. You may have more success quitting if you share your story, hear the stories of those who may be struggling and those who have successfully quit, and find someone to partner with.

## Finding information and support

If you're ready to quit drugs or alcohol, congratulations. You are taking an important step for your health and for your baby's health. Contact these organizations for information and help with quitting:

Government of Canada's Health Pregnancy website	<a href="http://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/healthy-living/healthy-pregnancy.html">www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/healthy-living/healthy-pregnancy.html</a>	Visit the website.
Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)	<a href="http://www.aa.org">www.aa.org</a>	Call a local AA office, or visit the website.
Narcotics Anonymous (NA)	<a href="http://www.na.org">www.na.org</a>	(818) 773-9999
Dual Recovery Anonymous (DRA)	<a href="http://www.draonline.org">www.draonline.org</a>	1-877-883-2332 (toll-free)

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## **⚠ Is it an emergency?**

If you or someone in your care has chest pains, difficulty breathing, or severe bleeding, it could be a **life-threatening emergency**. Call **9-1-1** or the local emergency number immediately.

If you are concerned about a possible poisoning or exposure to a toxic substance, call **Poison Control** now at **1-800-567-8911**.