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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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How do drugs that I take when pregnant affect my developing baby?

Most drugs, including alcohol and tobacco, pass from your bloodstream into the baby. So, the baby gets what you get. Because your baby is small and still developing it can't handle drugs as easily or as quickly as you can.

Is it okay to drink beer or wine, just not hard liquor?

No. A bottle of beer, a glass of wine, and a shot of liquor all have the same amounts of alcohol in them. So all of them have the same effect on you and your baby.

Which is more harmful to my baby—to continue using alcohol and drugs or to withdraw from them?

It's different for every drug (including alcohol and tobacco). To find out for sure, ask a doctor, pharmacist, or community health nurse.

What if people tell me it's too stressful to quit smoking during my pregnancy?

Some people may tell you it's better to keep smoking, but this is not true. Smoking moms are more likely to have low birth weight babies. If you can't quit smoking when you are pregnant, try to cut down.

If my baby is low birth weight, doesn't that mean I'll have an easier delivery?

No, it doesn't! In fact, a smaller baby can make delivery more difficult. The baby isn't strong enough to help you deliver. Low birth weight babies often have more problems as they grow up. They can be less healthy, cry more often, and need more of your attention.

Can my baby be affected by other people's smoke (second-hand smoke)?

Yes. Second-hand smoke can cause health problems for you and your baby.

What about my friend who smoked and drank during her pregnancy? Her baby seems fine.

Alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs affect each pregnant woman and her baby differently. It depends on when, how much, and how often you drink. It also depends on whether or not you use one or several drugs at the same time, what else is going on in your life, and how your body reacts to drugs. Different problems also happen at different stages of your pregnancy. And, some of the effects of drugs on the baby are obvious at birth, but other effects don't appear until later in life.

For more information and to find an addiction services office near you, please call the 24-hour Helpline at 1-866-332-2322.

What if I was drinking or using drugs before I knew I was pregnant?

The effects on your baby will depend on the things listed in the question above. Don't panic. Stress and worry can make things worse for you and your baby. Talk to a health-care provider about your situation.

Someone told me you shouldn't drink in the first trimester (three months) of pregnancy, but after that it's okay to drink. Is this true?

No. Using alcohol and other drugs can be harmful to your baby throughout your whole pregnancy. Different problems can happen at different stages. It's never too late to quit or cut down.

Are over-the-counter and prescription drugs safe to use during pregnancy?

Some are safe and some are not. Always check with a doctor, pharmacist, or community health nurse before you take any medication.

Is it true that it's okay to drink wine or beer when breastfeeding?

No. A little bit of most things you eat or drink pass through your breast milk to your baby. So, alcohol and other drugs can affect your breast milk. Try to drink other liquids, like milk or water. They help your milk flow and are better for both of you.

These Questions and Answers are adapted/reprinted from the Give and Take booklet with permission from Action on Women's Addictions - Research and Education (AWARE), Ontario