

Keeping healthy during your pregnancy.

Keeping healthy throughout your pregnancy includes eating healthy food, getting exercise, getting enough rest, preventing the spread of infection, not smoking or drinking alcohol, and not taking recreational drugs. It may also include maintaining your cultural, spiritual and emotional well-being. Taking steps to ensure you and your baby are living a healthy lifestyle is vitally important. Everything you consume, inhale and expose your body to will have an effect on your baby - some can have a negative effect. Let's take a closer look at the effects of smoking, alcohol, recreational drugs, caffeine and over-the-counter medications.

Taking care with medicines.

Even common over-the-counter medicines that are generally safe may be considered off-limits during pregnancy because of their potential effects on your baby along with some prescription medicines. To make sure you don't take anything that could be harmful to your baby ask your LMC which medicines — both over-the-counter and prescription — are safe to take during pregnancy.

Also remember to discuss any natural remedies, supplements, and vitamins you may be taking. Importantly, while supplementing with certain vitamins and minerals may help fill nutritional gaps, supplements are not meant to replace a healthy eating plan and lifestyle. Although supplements can be necessary and helpful in certain circumstances, always check with your LMC or health care provider regarding doses, safety, and potential risks and benefits.

Smoking.

"When you smoke, so does your baby..." There is no safe level of smoking, either for you or your baby. Smoking during pregnancy exposes your unborn baby to over 7000 chemicals contained in cigarette smoke. Pregnancy is a great time for you to quit smoking.

Smoking during pregnancy affects the baby's growth and will mean more likelihood of health problems such as: a lower birth-weight that could be harmful, an increased risk of cot death (SIDS), pneumonia, asthma or glue ear, an increased risk of miscarrying or having a stillborn baby, your baby being born with abnormalities such as cleft lip or cleft palate and bleeding during the last months of pregnancy, which can be life-threatening for you and your baby. It's never too late to quit smoking. Stopping anytime during your pregnancy has great benefits for you and your baby. The earlier you stop smoking, the greater the benefit. Giving up smoking is difficult – there are many ways to get help and support, have a chat with your LMC or health care provider about your options.

Alcohol.

Drinking alcohol in pregnancy can lead to long-term harm to your baby, with the more you drink, the greater the risk, there is no known safe amount. When you drink, alcohol passes from your blood through the placenta and to your baby. Your baby's liver is one of the last organs to develop and does not mature until the later stages of pregnancy. Your baby cannot process alcohol as well as you can, and too much exposure to alcohol can seriously affect their development. Drinking alcohol, especially in the first 3 months of pregnancy, increases the risk of miscarriage, premature birth and your baby having a low birthweight. Drinking after the first 3 months of your pregnancy could affect your baby after they're born. The risks are greater the more you drink. The effects include learning difficulties and behavioural problems. Drinking heavily throughout pregnancy can cause your baby to develop a serious condition called fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS). Symptoms include: poor growth, possible distinct facial features, learning and behavioural problems.



Cannabis and/or other recreational drugs.

Using recreational drugs can cause complications during pregnancy and serious problems in your developing baby and the newborn baby. For pregnant women, injecting recreational drugs increases the risk of infections that can affect or be transmitted to your baby. These infections include hepatitis and sexually transmitted diseases (including HIV). Drugs such as methamphetamine can cause significant harm to your baby, including brain damage and birth defects. Other drugs such as heroin may cause your baby to be born drug-dependent and suffer from withdrawal symptoms. Drug-dependent babies require expert care following birth and will likely have long-term effects throughout adulthood.

If you are using drugs, talk to your LMC or GP. They are there to support you, not judge you and they will be able to refer you to a local service for further help and support. The Alcohol Drug Helpline provides free, confidential information, help and support 0800 787 797 (24 hours a day) free text 8681.

Caffeine.

Caffeine is a stimulant that provides a boost of energy and makes you feel more alert - widely used to start your day! While caffeine is considered safe for the general population, health authorities advise limiting your intake while you're pregnant as it may cause negative side effects in some and may pose risks during pregnancy. Pregnant women metabolize caffeine much more slowly. In fact, it can take 1.5–3.5 times longer to eliminate caffeine from your body. Caffeine also crosses the placenta and enters your baby's bloodstream, raising concerns that it can affect the baby's health. An American study states that moderate amounts of caffeine — less than 200 mg per day — are not linked to an increased risk of miscarriage or preterm birth, however, research suggests that intakes greater than 200 mg per day may raise the risk of miscarriage. However, more research is needed in this area as the results are unclear. Other negative side effects of caffeine include high blood pressure, rapid heartbeat, increased anxiety, dizziness, restlessness, abdominal pain and diarrhea for Mum. Avoiding energy drinks entirely during pregnancy, as they usually contain high amounts of added sugars or artificial sweeteners, which lack nutritional value and generally include various herbs, such as ginseng, that have been deemed unsafe for pregnant women. Other herbs used in energy drinks have not been adequately studied for their safety during pregnancy. Switching to a herbal tea may be something you would like to try - peppermint, lemon balm, ginger root are considered safe during pregnancy along with red raspberry leaf but limit to 1 cup a day (240ml) during your first trimester.

Nourishing your body with nutrient-dense foods, as well as getting enough exercise and sleep and minimizing stress, is the best way to ensure a healthy pregnancy for you and your baby.

