

Breastfeeding and Drugs Prescribed, Over-the-Counter, Herbs, Illegal

Anything you take into your body when breastfeeding may pass through your breastmilk into your baby. Most of the time, this is not a problem. BUT, you should check out anything you plan to take including prescribed drugs, over-the-counter drugs (aspirin, cold remedies, cough syrup, vitamin-mineral supplements, etc.), herbs (chamomile tea, echinacea, St. John's Wort, etc.), and illegal drugs (street drugs like marijuana, cocaine, heroin, etc.)

First of all, don't take illegal drugs when breastfeeding. They pass into your breastmilk and are very harmful to your baby! Taking illegal drugs could have legal consequences, too.

Things to ask your doctor/pharmacist before taking any type of drug:

1. Will the drug pass into my bloodstream?

If the answer is no, it is probably okay to take when breastfeeding.

2. If the drug passes into my bloodstream, will it get into my breastmilk?

If the answer is no, it is probably okay to take when breastfeeding.

3. If the drug gets into my breastmilk, will it survive in my baby's stomach?

If the answer is no, it is probably okay to take when breastfeeding.

4. If the drug survives in my baby's stomach, will it get into my baby's bloodstream?

If the answer is no, it is probably okay to take when breastfeeding.

If the answer is yes, then the drug might cause harm to your baby.

Then ask: what kind of side effects might this drug cause in my baby?

If the side effects are harmful, ask your doctor if there is another drug you could take that might be safer.

Note: If babies are treated with this drug, it is probably okay to take when breastfeeding.



5. One other thing to ask: Will this drug reduce my milk supply?

If yes, ask the doctor if there is another drug you could take that would not affect your milk supply.

When you talk with your doctor:

1. Make sure to explain that you are breastfeeding and that you want to continue to breastfeed.

2. Ask your doctor to prescribe short-acting drugs – drugs that you have to take every 3-4 hours rather than one you take once a day. These drugs do not build up in your baby's system over time.

3. Ask your doctor if your baby can easily clear the drug from his system. If the drug builds up over time, this can cause harmful effects. Older, healthy babies can handle drugs much better than newborn or premature babies.

4. If a drug makes you sleepy or depressed, it may make your baby sleepy or depressed. Stay away from these drugs if you are breastfeeding. If you need to take an antihistamine, take one that does not make you sleepy.

5. Ask your doctor/pharmacist when the lowest amount of the drug is in your system. Breastfeed your baby

when the amounts are lowest, usually right before it is time for your next dose.

6. If you must take a drug that requires you to stop breastfeeding while you take it, pump and throw your breastmilk away while taking the drug. This way, you will still have breastmilk when your doctor says it is okay to resume breastfeeding.

7. Check out anything you apply to your nipples. Things like vitamin E oil applied to your nipples can build up to harmful levels in your baby's body. Do not assume vitamin and mineral oils are harmless. There are many reports of these items harming babies!

8. Birth control products that contain estrogen can impact your milk supply. The types of birth control that are okay to use when breastfeeding include:

Breastfeeding – breastfeeding is very effective if you meet all of the following: you are breastfeeding every 4-6 hours during the day and night; your baby is less than 6 months old, you are not spotting and have not started your monthly period, and you feed your baby only breastmilk – nothing else like cereal, juice, or formula.

Natural Family Planning – this method involves watching your discharge throughout the month.

IUDs, condoms, cervical caps, and diaphragms

Progestin-only methods – mini-pill, Norplant, DepoProvera. Wait until your baby is six weeks old before starting progestin-only methods.

9. One last reminder – **do not take street drugs when breastfeeding!** They are bad for you and your baby! Street drugs will show up in your baby's urine for a long time. There are reports of babies being taken away from their mothers because urine tests in the babies proved positive for street drugs.

For more information on drugs, check the following resources:

A Medication Guide for Breastfeeding Moms by Thomas Hale, PhD, and Ghia McAfee, PhD. (a reference for moms)
Medications and Mothers' Milk by Thomas Hale, PhD. (a reference for doctors and pharmacists)

Both are available from:
www.iBreastfeeding.com

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