



Tobacco, Alcohol and Other Substances to Avoid

While the placenta plays a role in screening some toxins from the fetus, it can't keep everything out. Substances such as alcohol, marijuana, cocaine and tobacco do a great amount of harm to a developing fetus. Even after your baby is born, breast-feeding while using harmful substances can have devastating effects on your baby.

HAZARDS YOU CAN AVOID

- Drinking during pregnancy can cause miscarriage, stillbirth and fetal alcohol syndrome: mental retardation, slow physical growth and birth defects of the face, head, heart and skeleton.
- Smoking can cause low-birth-weight babies and raises the risk of premature birth. Smoking exposes your baby to cancer-causing chemicals and reduces the amount of oxygen he receives. The risk of miscarriage or stillbirth is 50 percent higher when the mother smokes. Children of smokers are also more likely to die of sudden infant death syndrome.
- Even occasional use of recreational drugs can have harmful effects on your baby. Illegal drugs can cause organ malformation, low birth weight and brain damage. Newborn babies who become addicted to drugs inside the womb suffer painful withdrawal symptoms. Later they often suffer from chronic health problems and learning disabilities.



SUBSTANCES YOU MAY NOT CONSIDER HARMFUL—BUT CAN BE

- **Caffeine**—Women who drink large quantities of caffeinated drinks are more prone to miscarriages and smaller babies.
- **Prescription or over-the-counter medications**—Your baby can suffer dangerous effects from medications that pass through the placenta. Always check with your doctor before taking any medication.
- **X-rays**—Exposure to radiation in the uterus increases the risk of cancer and leukemia in children.
- **Salt**—Too much salt can cause your body to retain water, raising your blood pressure.
- **Secondhand smoke**—Whatever you inhale, even the toxins from secondhand smoke, can make its way into your baby's body. Asthma and allergies can result from exposure to secondhand smoke.