

## What to Avoid During Pregnancy

While you are pregnant, it is important for you to lead a healthy lifestyle: eat healthy foods, get plenty of rest, and exercise regularly. It is also terribly important that you avoid anything that might harm your baby, especially during the critical stages of your baby's prenatal development. This pamphlet is designed to give you information on some of the top things that you should avoid during pregnancy to help keep you and your unborn baby safe.

### Alcohol

When you become pregnant, there is no amount of alcohol consumption that is considered safe. There is also no time during the pregnancy that it is considered safe to drink alcohol.<sup>1</sup> When you drink alcohol, it quickly absorbs into your bloodstream and passes through the placenta into the blood of your unborn baby. When a mother consumes excessive amounts of alcohol, her pre-born child is at risk for fetal alcohol syndrome. Babies who have this syndrome are shorter and lighter in weight than normal babies. They do not catch up later in life, even after special care is provided. They have small heads; abnormal features of the face, head, joints, and limbs; heart defects; and poor control of movement. They run a high risk of being mentally retarded or having behavioral problems.<sup>1</sup> The best advice about drinking while you are pregnant is ***DON'T DO IT.***

***FETAL ALCOHOL SYNDROME IS THE MOST COMMON PREVENTABLE CAUSE OF BIRTH DEFECTS IN THE UNITED STATES.<sup>1</sup>***

### Cigarettes and Secondhand Smoke

Babies born to moms who smoke are smaller because their blood flow is restricted. The restricted blood flow affects the nutrients and oxygen that flow to the baby through the placenta.<sup>2</sup> Because of the conclusive information from studies, doctors advise pregnant women not to smoke and to stay clear of secondhand smoke.

### Illegal Drugs, Prescription Drugs, Over-the-Counter Remedies, Herbs, and Vitamins

In general, all drugs should be avoided during pregnancy unless absolutely necessary because many can harm your unborn baby. About two to three percent of all birth defects result from the use of drugs other than alcohol.<sup>3</sup> Before taking any drug, including over-the-counter drugs, pain medications or dietary supplements (including medicinal herbs), you should consult your doctor and get his or her consent.

### Caffeine and Diet Soda

Colas, iced tea, chocolate, and coffee are common foods that contain caffeine. Doctors say that a little caffeine is not a problem, but more than two eight-ounce cups of coffee or five cans of soda a day increase the risk of miscarriage.<sup>4</sup> Aspartame and saccharin are the artificial sweeteners found in diet sodas. They have been found to be harmful to animals in studies, but small amounts have not been proven to be harmful to pregnant women. However, because many diet sodas contain caffeine and fill you up, they are best avoided. Milk has nutrients that are good for you and your baby. Water is another good replacement for diet sodas.

### Cat Litter and Raw Meat

Both cat feces and raw meat carry a parasite called *toxoplasma gondii*. These parasites cause a flu-like illness called toxoplasmosis. When contracted by a pregnant woman, toxoplasmosis can result in severe brain or liver

damage for her pre-born baby. Another effect may be damage to the retina of the baby's eye, resulting in visual impairment or blindness. If you have a cat, get someone else to clean the litter box. If you have an outdoor cat, wear gloves when you garden or do yardwork. Avoid any contact whatsoever with cat feces.

Eating raw or undercooked meat is one of the most common ways that you can contract toxoplasmosis.<sup>5</sup> If you eat meat, wash off all surfaces and utensils that touched the raw meat, and don't prepare meat and raw foods like salads on the same cutting board. Wash your hands thoroughly after handling raw meat.

## Raw and Cooked Fish

Raw fish and shellfish have the potential of carrying bacterial infection, hepatitis, and/or parasites that you can pass on to your baby through your bloodstream. Also, canned tuna and the following cooked fish should be avoided because of the high mercury content: swordfish, shark, king mackerel, tilefish, sea bass, marlin, halibut, pike, walleye, and largemouth bass.

## Radiation

We are surrounded by radiation everywhere — from sunshine, airplane travel, X-rays, cell phones. But there is no reason to panic. It takes quite a lot of exposure before it becomes harmful. Avoid high doses of radiation to the pelvis area or continual small doses. If you see your dentist, be sure to tell him or her that you are pregnant. The dental assistant will put a lead apron over your midsection, which blocks the radiation from penetrating during any potential x-ray.

## Lifting And Exercise

Avoid lifting when pregnant. If you have to lift something, bend and lift with your legs, not your back. During pregnancy, your body emits a hormone that relaxes your muscles and connective tissues. Pregnant women have looser ligaments, and as you grow larger, your center of gravity changes, so let someone else do the lifting, if possible. Avoid deep knee bends, full sit-ups, double leg raises, and straight-leg toe touches. These exercises may injure the tissue that connects your leg and back joints. Also avoid any activity that may cause you to slip and fall.

## Hair Dye And Hot Tubs

Although scientists do not know the exact effects hair dye has on a fetus, they do know that hair dye is absorbed through the scalp and enters your bloodstream. To be safe, color or perm your hair only after the second trimester and make sure you have adequate ventilation.

The hot water in hot tubs causes perspiration, and this causes blood to go to the surface of your skin rather than to the uterus. This could be dangerous to your baby. A warm bath is a safer choice.

## Household Hazards

Use household cleaners (especially those that produce fumes) only where there is good ventilation. If possible, adjust your cleaning to use nontoxic cleaning products like white vinegar, baking soda, borax, and treated dusting cloths.

Avoid using aerosol containers whenever possible. Don't use paint removers or solvents while you are pregnant. Latex or water-based paints are safer than oil-based paints. Stay away from any chemicals that kill weeds and bugs.

Lead is very dangerous to your unborn baby. If you live in an old home, there is the chance that the water pipes are made of lead or that the paint on the walls has lead in it. If the pipes are made of lead, drink bottled water. If this is not possible, let the water run for at least five minutes before filling your glass. Avoid peeling paint. Colored glossy newspaper inserts and magazines, or metallic gift-wrap inks may also have high lead content. Handle these items as infrequently as possible. Don't use foreign-made pottery for food or drinks and don't drink from lead crystal glasses.

References:

1. Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASDs) Fact Sheet. <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/fasd/facts.html>, accessed 3-15-2018.
2. Centers for Disease Control (CDC). How Does Smoking During Pregnancy Harm My Health and My Baby?. <https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/maternalinfanthealth/tobaccousepregnancy/index.htm>, accessed 13-15-2018.
3. Drugs Taken During Pregnancy Could Be Harmful To Baby. [http://www.redorbit.com/news/health/1791819/drugs\\_taken\\_during\\_pregnancy\\_could\\_be\\_harmful\\_to\\_baby/](http://www.redorbit.com/news/health/1791819/drugs_taken_during_pregnancy_could_be_harmful_to_baby/), accessed 3-15-2018.
4. Xiaoping W., et al. Maternal Caffeine Consumption during Pregnancy and the Risk of Miscarriage: A Prospective Cohort Study. *American Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology*, 2008; 198 (3): 279.e1-279.e8.
5. Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Toxoplasmosis Fact Sheet. <https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/toxoplasmosis/epi.html>, accessed 3-15-2018.