

Medicines and Breastfeeding

Medicines and drugs used by a breastfeeding mother may pass through her breast milk to her baby. Medicines and drugs include prescription and non-prescription medicines, herbal medicines, alcohol, nicotine, caffeine and illegal drugs. When breastfeeding, always check with a doctor or pharmacist before using any medicine or drug.

Risks

Some medicines or drugs that pass to the baby through the mother's milk can have effects on the baby including:

- Making the baby restless or irritable
- Making the baby drowsy
- Causing vomiting and diarrhoea in the baby
- Affecting the suckling reflex of the baby.

Some medicines and drugs used by a breastfeeding mother can also affect the quantity and quality (e.g., taste) of her breast milk.

Things to be considered when a breastfeeding mother is deciding whether to use medicines or drugs include:

- The benefit to the mother of using the medicine or drug.
- The potential effects of the medicine or drug on the baby.
- The benefits to the baby of breastfeeding. (Formula-fed babies are more susceptible to illness than breast-fed babies).

Health authorities recommend that breastfeeding mothers avoid social and recreational drugs, limit their use of non-prescription medicines, alcohol and caffeine and stop (or at least reduce) smoking. Both nicotine and cigarette smoke have serious adverse effects on babies.

Self care

It is best to breastfeed if possible. Breast milk is the best food for babies and breastfeeding has emotional, physical and practical benefits for babies and mothers. Sometimes mothers need medicines to help maintain good health. By following appropriate advice and precautions, many mothers can safely use necessary medicines and also breastfeed.

- Remind doctors and pharmacists that you are breastfeeding when discussing and before taking any medicine, whether prescription or non-prescription.
- If you need to use a medicine (e.g., for infection, post natal depression, epilepsy, hypertension), your doctor and pharmacist can help you choose a medicine that is recommended in breastfeeding.
- If you need to use a medicine, monitor your baby for any adverse effects (e.g., sleepiness or irritability) that may occur.
- Do not use someone else's medicine. Only take medicine prescribed for you.
- Limit or avoid alcohol.
- Limit or avoid caffeine (e.g., coffee, tea, cola, energy drinks).
- Don't use social and recreational drugs.
- Don't smoke. If you do smoke, consider quitting. If you need help to quit smoking, ask a doctor or

Important

Whilst breastfeeding:

- Tell your doctor and pharmacist that you are breastfeeding when discussing any health problems or medicines.
- Ask a doctor or pharmacist or phone a medicine help-line for advice before using any medicines

pharmacist for advice. Mothers who cannot quit are generally advised to continue breastfeeding and take precautions to protect the baby. A smoking mother should not smoke just before she breastfeeds and no-one should smoke in the same room as the baby.

Safety of some non-prescription medicines and drugs when breastfeeding

If a medicine or drug does not appear in this list, this does not mean it is safe for use while breastfeeding.

Alcohol – Alcohol passes freely into breast milk and a safe level of alcohol consumption during breastfeeding has not been defined. An occasional drink is probably not harmful, but alcohol should be kept to a minimum. Wait at least 2 hours for each standard drink consumed before breastfeeding.

Analgesics for pain relief, fever

- aspirin
- paracetamol
- codeine
- NSAIDs (e.g., diclofenac, ibuprofen, naproxen)

Avoid use.
Safe to use in recommended doses.
Occasional use safe.
Discuss with pharmacist before use.

Anti- allergy medicines (e.g., for hay fever)

- oral antihistamines
- corticosteroid nasal sprays

Discuss with pharmacist before use.
Safe to use.

Antacids

Occasional use safe.

Caffeine (in coffee, tea, chocolate, cola, energy drinks) – Caffeine passes readily into breast milk. More than 300mg per day of caffeine (about 3 cups coffee) may cause baby to be irritable and unsettled.

Cannabis (marijuana)

Avoid use.

Coughs and colds

- decongestant nasal sprays
- oral decongestants (e.g., pseudoephedrine, phenylephrine)
- cough suppressants (e.g., dextromethorphan, pholcodine)

Safe to use, but limit to 5 days.
Discuss with pharmacist before use.
Discuss with pharmacist before use.

Gastroenteritis medicines

- oral rehydration solutions (eg., gastrolyte, hydralyte)
- anti-diarrhoeals (e.g., loperamide, diphenoxylate)

Safe to use.
Discuss with pharmacist before use.

Herbal medicines

Discuss with pharmacist before use.

Inhaled bronchodilators for asthma

(e.g., *Asmol*, *Bricanyl*, *Ventolin*)

Safe to use.

Iron preparations (e.g., *Fefol*, *FGF*, *Ferrogradumet*)

Safe to use in recommended doses.

Laxatives for constipation

- bulk forming (e.g., ispaghula, psyllium, sterculia)
 - osmotic laxatives (e.g., glycerol, lactulose, sorbitol)
- stimulant laxatives (e.g., bisacodyl, senna)

Safe to use.
Safe to use.
Discuss with pharmacist.

Thrush medicines

- oral thrush (e.g., miconazole, nystatin)
- vaginal thrush (e.g., clotrimazole, econazole,)

Safe to use.
Safe to use.

Vitamins

Discuss with pharmacist.

Worm medicines (e.g., mebendazole, pyrantel)

Discuss with pharmacist.

For more information

Australian Breastfeeding Association

Listed under 'Breastfeeding' in the yellow pages of the phone book

Website: www.breastfeeding.asn.au

Healthdirect Australia

Phone: 1800 022 222

Website: www.healthinsite.gov.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)

Your pharmacist can advise on CMI leaflets.

National Prescribing Service (NPS) Medicines Information

Phone: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)

Website: www.nps.org.au

The Poisons Information Centre

In case of poisoning phone 13 11 26 from anywhere in Australia.

*Pharmacists are medicines experts.
Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.*

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