

BIRTH DEFECTS DUE TO ALCOHOL/DRUGS

Most pregnant women worry about whether they will give birth to a healthy baby. This is normal. There are many things we can do to increase the chances of a baby being born healthy. One of them is to avoid drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes, and taking drugs (including prescription and non-prescription drugs without your doctor's permission).

A woman's drug use can affect both her fetus and her newborn. Most drugs cross the placenta – the organ that provides nourishment to the fetus. Some drugs can cause poisonous effects and/or drug dependency in the fetus.

Drugs can cause problems throughout pregnancy. For example, the early part of pregnancy is most critical for the health of the fetus. This is when the main body systems are forming and drug use can cause severe damage. This is why it is so important to stop using any drugs before getting pregnant. During the last 12 weeks of pregnancy, drug use poses the greatest risk for stunting fetal growth and causing premature birth.

Alcohol is the most common drug abused in the United States. Use of alcohol during pregnancy is the most common cause of mental retardation in babies. Babies can be born with a variety of problems from weighing less, heart and face defects, short stature, hyperactivity, poor attention spans, and nervousness. There is no safe level of drinking during pregnancy as even women who are moderate drinkers have delivered babies with birth defects. It is safest not to drink any alcohol when pregnant.

Smoking tobacco or marijuana during pregnancy may lead to miscarriage, still birth, vaginal bleeding, babies born with low birth weight and recent research links smoking to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

Cocaine is a highly addictive drug that the baby may be born addicted to if the mother used while pregnant. Women who use cocaine have a 25% higher chance of delivering the baby prematurely. The babies may be small, grow slowly, have brain injury, and be irritable and fussy.

Prescription drug abuse is on the rise in the United States and many women who use or abuse prescription drugs can have babies born with any or all of the defects listed above, including dependency on the drug. Even non-prescription cold medicines can be dangerous for a fetus. Any pregnant woman should talk to her doctor before taking any prescription or over-the-counter medications.

When a woman uses drugs during her pregnancy, so does her baby. Women who stop using during pregnancy can have healthier babies. If it is difficult for a woman to stop using a drug, it is important she ask for help to quit. Help is available through her family doctor, All Area Counseling Services (920-787-7472) and Waushara County Human Services (920-787-6550). In Green Lake call Green Lake County Human Services (920-294-4070) and in Marquette County call Marquette Chemical Dependency Service (608-297-2085). Health care providers are not here to judge anyone, but to help you quit using

with the least discomfort. If you have a problem with drugs or alcohol, it's okay to ask for help. This article is sponsored by the Waushara and Marquette Counties Healthy baby Coalition.