

Alcohol and cannabis use during pregnancy

Information for health
care providers





Not everyone knows the risks alcohol and cannabis pose during pregnancy.

Some people may hesitate to bring the topic up, but you can start the conversation.

Providing accurate information without judgement or shame helps them understand the risks and empowers them to make informed decisions about their pregnancy.

What are the key points to get across?



Normalize asking questions.

Reassure patients it's normal to have questions, and create an environment where they feel safe to ask without fear of judgement or being stigmatized. Remind them it's always best to ask a health care provider.



No safe amount. No safe time. No safe form.

No alcohol or cannabis while trying to conceive or pregnant is safest. There is little known about the effects of alcohol or cannabis consumption while breast or chest feeding. Some research shows there may be negative effects on child health and development.



The risks are serious, but preventable.

Prenatal alcohol and cannabis exposure poses risks to both the pregnant person and the fetus. Risks include low birth weight or premature birth, miscarriage or stillbirth, and impacts to brain and physical development.



It's never too late to make a change.

If a patient realizes they may have consumed alcohol or cannabis before knowing they were pregnant, reassure them they didn't know and it's common. This gives them space to be open about their alcohol and cannabis use. Remind them it's not too late to reduce or stop use to lessen the potential impacts.



Emphasize community support

It's not the pregnant person's sole responsibility to reduce or stop alcohol or cannabis use during this time. Discuss the role a partner, friends, and/or family play in supporting a healthy pregnancy.

What risks should patients know about..

While trying to get pregnant?

Alcohol and cannabis may impact both men's and women's fertility and decrease the ability to become pregnant.

During pregnancy?

Since a baby's brain and body are developing during the entire pregnancy, prenatal alcohol exposure may result in lifelong physical, mental, social, behavioural and learning challenges. This is called Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and is a lifelong condition. There is also the risk of early delivery and low birth weight.

If someone is using cannabis to manage pregnancy-related symptoms, explore safer alternatives with them. There is insufficient evidence to conclude that cannabis use alleviates symptoms.

If someone is using cannabis for medical reasons, weigh the benefits of using cannabis against the potential risks to them and the fetus. Be open to discussing alternatives, if necessary, and trust they will make the best decision for their health.



While nursing?



Alcohol and THC or CBD from cannabis can enter breast milk.

Exposure to alcohol in breast milk can impact a baby's growth, movement, sleep or ability to learn. Exposure to THC through breast milk may cause babies to be drowsy, have reduced muscular tone and have poor suckling.

The most important thing is to ensure patients know the facts and feel empowered to make informed decisions about their pregnancy. Be aware of any stigma and approach conversations using a harm reduction lens. Keep in mind other factors that may influence why a patient is using alcohol or cannabis while pregnant and why they might be hesitant to discuss the topic, and remind them support is available.

For more information, resources and support, patients and health care providers can visit:

[KnowMyLimits.ca](https://www.knowmylimits.ca)

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