

Medications and Breastfeeding

Medications that make you sleepy can affect you and how you care for your baby. You may need help from others during this time.



Frequently Asked Questions

Can I use any over-the-counter medications if I am breastfeeding?

There are many over-the-counter medications that are safe to use during breastfeeding. Always check with your doctor or a pharmacist before taking over-the-counter medications like pain relievers, cold medicines, vitamins and herbs.

Can I take any prescription medication?

Many medications are safe to take when breastfeeding.

- Remind your doctor that you are breastfeeding before he prescribes any medication.
- Be sure to tell your doctor all medications and herbal supplements you are taking.
- If your doctor prescribes a medication that requires you to stop breastfeeding, ask if there is a safer choice.
- Medications and Mothers' Milk by Thomas Hale, PhD, is a good resource for finding safe medications for breastfeeding mothers. The Physicians Desk Reference (PDR) is NOT a good reference for this purpose.
- A pharmacist, lactation consultant or the breastfeeding coordinator at the health department has information on drug and breastfeeding interactions.

What about anesthesia?

Many anesthetics are considered safe. Check with your doctor about other medications that may have been given before you breastfeed. You can usually breastfeed as soon as you are awake and feel up to it.



Can I use birth control?

Breastfeeding women have several birth control options including: condoms, vaginal spermicides, Progestin-only "mini-pills" and Depo-Provera. Contraceptives containing estrogen (pill, patch or ring) tend to decrease milk supply. It is best to wait 6 weeks after the birth of your baby to take these contraceptives. Discuss your options with your doctor.

What about nicotine?

If a mother smokes cigarettes, she can still breastfeed. Heavy smoking (more than 20 cigarettes a day) can reduce a mother's milk supply and has been known to cause symptoms in the breastfed baby. Avoid smoking immediately before or during breastfeeding or anywhere around the baby. It is best to smoke outside and away from the baby.

Can I drink alcohol while breastfeeding?

Alcohol fits in the category of foods to avoid. A safe level of alcohol consumption while breastfeeding has not been determined. It is best not to drink while breastfeeding. If you do drink, do this after breastfeeding or wait to breastfeed at least 1 hour for each drink you have. Limit alcohol to only an occasional drink while you are breastfeeding.

Breastfeeding and Common Medications



Source: Medications and Mothers' Milk, Tenth Edition, Hale, Thomas.

Medication	Use	Is It Breastfeeding Friendly?	Comments
Tylenol— acetaminophen Advil— ibuprofen	Pain	Yes	
Claritin Benadryl	Cold, Allergies	Yes	Observe infant for drowsiness
Sudafed	Cold, Allergies	No	Can decrease milk supply
Amoxicillin Ampicillin Cephalexin (Keflex) Erythromycin Penicillin Zithromax	Antibiotics	Yes	
Fluconazole (Diflucan)	Yeast Infection	Yes	
Prozac	Anti-Depressant	No	Zoloft or Paxil are preferred alternatives
Zoloft Paxil	Anti-Depressant	Yes	
Depo-Provera Progestin-only oral contraceptives	Birth Control	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progestin used before one week after delivery may cause low milk supply • Oral progestin-only birth control may be preferred • Attempt to wait 6 weeks after delivery to use Depo-Provera
St. John's Wort	Herbal Supplement	No	Zoloft or Paxil are preferred alternatives

This is general information concerning the most commonly used medications. Please discuss with your doctor.



Breastfeeding Welcome Here

For more information on breastfeeding, talk with your Nutritionist or Nurse and the Lactation Consultant at the hospital where you had your baby.