

# OPIATE USE DURING PREGNANCY

Children's  
MINNESOTA

childrensmn.org

## OPIATES

Medications or drugs known as opiates (or narcotics) are commonly prescribed for pain. The most common names of these drugs include OxyContin, Percocet, Vicodin, morphine and methadone. Use of opiates during pregnancy often causes complications for mothers as well as complications for babies exposed to opiates in the womb. Illegal opiates like heroin also cause risks for mother and baby.

Prescription opiates can be used illegally, or taken at higher doses than prescribed. Use of any form of opiate can lead to dependency which has been observed in the rapidly increasing number of young women that have developed opiate dependency in the past 10 years. Many people who have become dependent on prescription opiates are also at risk of using heroin.

The newborn baby exposed to opiates in the womb may have withdrawal symptoms after being born. When babies have symptoms of withdrawal, they often need to stay in the hospital longer and may not be able to stay in their mother's room. Instead, they may need the close observation and care that is given in a special care nursery. Newborn withdrawal and treatment varies and may last from several days to several months.

If you are using prescribed opiates during pregnancy, talk to your doctor or midwife about the possibility of safely replacing them with alternative therapies or about how to safely reduce your dose if alternatives are not available.

### Potential complications for mothers with opiate abuse:

- Increased rates of C-section delivery
- Preterm labor and premature delivery
- Placental abruption (pulling away of the placenta from the uterus wall which can cause large amounts of bleeding and is dangerous for both mom and baby)
- Cardiac arrest
- Increased need for transfusions
- A longer hospital stay following delivery
- Slightly higher risk of death for both you and your baby

## OPIATE USE DURING PREGNANCY: HOW DOES IT AFFECT MOTHERS AND BABIES?

During pregnancy, everything you eat or drink can have an effect on your unborn baby. This includes medications, drugs, alcohol and tobacco. Certain substances are not safe during pregnancy and you should review any medications, drugs (over the counter, prescribed and illegal), supplements, or herbs that you are taking with your doctor or midwife. By informing your care team about ALL drugs or medications that you take while pregnant, they will be able to give you and your baby the care you need to keep both of you healthy and safe.

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## RESOURCES AT CHILDREN'S MINNESOTA

### Breastfeeding Resource Center

Minneapolis: 612-863-4638

St. Paul: 651-241-6250

### Family Resource Center library

Minneapolis: 612-813-6816

St. Paul: 651-220-6368

### Information on Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome

[childrensMN.org/  
neonatalabstinencesyndrome](http://childrensMN.org/neonatalabstinencesyndrome)

### Primary care clinics –

[childrensMN.org/primarycare](http://childrensMN.org/primarycare)

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR PREGNANT AND POSTPARTUM MOTHERS

### Jeremiah Program

[info@jeremiahprogram.org](mailto:info@jeremiahprogram.org)

Minneapolis: 612-692-8711

St. Paul: 651-332-5002

### Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation

866-831-5700

[hazeldenbettyford.org/treatment/  
locations](http://hazeldenbettyford.org/treatment/locations)

### Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) Alcohol and Drug Abuse Division (ADAD) List of Women Services

651-431-2460

[DHS.ADAD@state.mn.us](mailto:DHS.ADAD@state.mn.us)

### Wayside House, Inc.

[waysidehouse.org](http://waysidehouse.org)

Women's Treatment in Minneapolis:

952-405-7637

Wayside Family Treatment Center:

952-405-7645

### Hennepin County – Chemical addiction treatment: 612-348-4111

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR INFANT CARE

### Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Hotline

1-800-662-4357 or [samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline](http://samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline)

### Minnesota Parents Know

[parentsknow.state.mn.us/](http://parentsknow.state.mn.us/)

[parentsknow/newborn](http://parentsknow/newborn)

### March of Dimes – [marchofdimes.org](http://marchofdimes.org)

Healthy Children – [healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages](http://healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages)

## Potential complications for babies exposed to opiates:

- Increased risk of birth defects
- Poor fetal growth during pregnancy
- Lowered amounts of amniotic fluid around the baby in the womb
- Infant withdrawal symptoms, called Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome or NAS. NAS can be severe enough to cause your baby to need a longer hospital stay until their symptoms decrease. Some babies will need to be given medication to help relieve the symptoms. You can learn more about NAS at [childrensMN.org/neonatalabstinencesyndrome](http://childrensMN.org/neonatalabstinencesyndrome).

## Breastfeeding while taking opiates

If you are using **illegal** opiates or other substances, you should not breastfeed your baby. He or she may receive the substance through your breastmilk which can be very dangerous.

If you are taking prescribed medication of any kind, talk to your doctor or midwife about the safety of breastfeeding. Every situation is different. Your doctor or midwife and lactation consultants can help you to create a long-term plan that is best for your situation.

If you have been told that you can breastfeed your baby safely while you are taking prescribed opiates it is important to know that stopping breastfeeding suddenly may increase your baby's withdrawal symptoms. Before you stop, you should discuss with your doctor or midwife how to safely wean your baby from breastfeeding.

## ILLEGAL USE OF HEROIN AND PRESCRIPTION OPIATES

It is very important that your doctor or midwife be aware of ALL medications and drugs you are taking. Your doctor or midwife can be expected to ask you about your use of substances during your pregnancy, since their concerns are for the health of you and your baby. Once aware, they can help you to understand the risks to you and your baby, monitor both of you more closely to give you the best care, anticipate special care that your baby may need after birth and help you find resources to quit using these substances.

Even though it may feel scary to share the information that you are using illegal substances, it is the best thing you can do to assure that you and your baby stay safe. When you have shared this information with your doctor or midwife, state law requires that he or she let the local child welfare agency know you are pregnant and using illegal substances. You will then be assisted to find services for substance abuse treatment that can help you to improve your health and begin a path of recovery.

Pregnant mothers who are dependent on opiates increase their risk of miscarriage and preterm birth. Treatment for dependency may include the use of opiate replacement therapies which are strongly recommended when opiate dependency complicates pregnancy. These therapies (methadone and buprenorphine) improve the chances that you will have a full term birth. Opiate replacement therapy is also the best way to manage opiate dependency following the birth of your baby, help you to stay on a path of recovery from substance use and increase the chances that you will be a successful parent.