



# Speaking for Children

What's best for our youngest children is best for everyone!

## Alcohol and pregnancy

Most of us are familiar with the effects alcohol abuse can have on others around us, but many mothers-to-be do not understand the dangers even **one** drink during pregnancy can have on an unborn child.

An advisory by the U.S. Surgeon General says that alcohol can cause damages at any stage of pregnancy. Research shows that up to 20 percent of mothers-to-be continue to drink during pregnancy. Experts say this is due largely to the fact that many women are not aware that even small amounts of alcohol can cause harm to the unborn child.

Fetal alcohol syndrome (FASD) is a set of physical and mental birth defects that can result when a woman drinks alcohol during her pregnancy.

When a pregnant woman drinks alcohol, such as beer, wine, or mixed drinks, so does her baby. Alcohol passes through the placenta right into the developing baby. The baby may suffer lifelong damage as a result.

Babies with FASD can have brain damage, facial deformities, and growth deficits. Heart, liver, and kidney defects also are common, as well as vision and hearing problems. Individuals with FASD have difficulties with learning, attention, memory, and problem solving.

Each year, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), as many as 40,000 babies are born with FASD, but many go undiagnosed because the symptoms are subtle or mild.

## Harmful substances to avoid during pregnancy

If you work with harmful substances, speak to your healthcare professional about the risks to your baby and your options. In general, the sooner you stop exposing yourself and your baby to those substances, the healthier both of you will be.

If you are having trouble breaking certain habits, such as smoking, drinking alcohol /caffeine, or taking drugs, speak to your healthcare professional.

All the following have a proven or highly suspected adverse effect on you and/or your developing baby and should be avoided:

### Alcohol

Alcohol passes through the placenta and may result in miscarriage, low birth-weight babies and severe disabilities associated with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. Remember: there is no established safe level of alcohol that can be consumed during pregnancy.

### Caffeine

Results of studies on the impact of caffeine consumption during pregnancy are controversial, but caffeine does pass through the placenta to the baby. Remember that some tea, many sodas, chocolate and over-the-counter medications contain caffeine, too.

### Glycol Ethers

These chemicals are found in inks, finishes, antifreeze and solutions used in electronics manufacturing. Glycol ethers are suspected of having a potent effect on both

female and male reproduction including infertility and causing chromosomal damage leading to miscarriage or genetic abnormalities in the fetus.

### High Temperatures

Although studies are inconclusive, experts say that during your pregnancy you should avoid any activity that could raise your body temperature over 102° F (38.9° C) for a sustained period of time. This includes hot weather workouts and steam rooms, as well as saunas, hot tubs and whirlpools. Take care with electric blankets: if you use one to warm the bed, turn it off when you get in.

### Radiation

The ionizing radiation in X-rays is dangerous, so exposure should be carefully monitored by your healthcare professional and dentist. Non-ionizing radiation from televisions, computer screens, microwave ovens and power plants has been suspected to be harmful, but current studies are inconclusive.

### "Social" and Other Drugs

Marijuana, cocaine, crack, heroin and other drugs all pass through the placenta and can seriously affect the baby. Among the serious problems that result from drug exposure during pregnancy are miscarriage, premature labor, and an increased possibility of stillbirth and death in the first week of life.

### Tobacco Smoke

Smoking reduces your baby's supply of oxygen by constricting blood vessels. Even secondhand smoke from other people's cigarettes, cigars or pipes has been associated with miscarriage, low birth weight, preterm deliveries and other problems.

A pregnant smoker is at higher risk of having her baby born too early and with an abnormally low weight. A woman who smokes during or after pregnancy increases her infant's risk of death from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

Millions of Americans have health problems caused by smoking. Cigarette smoking and exposure to tobacco smoke cause an estimated average of 438,000 premature deaths each year in the United States. Of these prema-

ture deaths, about 40 percent are from cancer, 35 percent are from heart disease and stroke, and 25 percent are from lung disease. Smoking is the leading cause of premature, preventable death in this country.

Regardless of their age, smokers can substantially reduce their risk of disease, including cancer, by quitting.

### Toxoplasmosis

Toxoplasmosis is a disease you can get from cats, from eating raw meat or from drinking unpasteurized milk. The disease can harm the fetus but if you've had a pet cat for awhile you may have immunity to it already.

Your healthcare professional can give you a test to see if you have immunity, and you can also have your cat tested for active infection. You can protect yourself and your baby by cooking all meats thoroughly and wearing rubber gloves when handling uncooked meat, changing cat litter boxes or touching garden dirt that might contain the toxoplasma parasite.

### Local Substance Abuse Resources

**Casa Teresa** - Culturally specific bilingual (Spanish/English) residential treatment program for pregnant and parenting women. Sliding scale. **829-9557**

**Drug Abuse Alternatives Center (DAAC)** - For pregnant and parenting women who are changing from drug abuse, use, or addiction to a drug-free lifestyle.  
[www.daacinfo.org](http://www.daacinfo.org). **544-3295**

**Women's Recovery Services** - Residential treatment services for women who are dependent on alcohol or other drugs and their young children.  
[www.womensrecoveryservices.org](http://www.womensrecoveryservices.org). **527-0412**

**Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)**  
Santa Rosa Bookstore and General Information - 546-2066  
Long distance - 1-800-224-1300  
Petaluma - 762-5122  
Santa Rosa - 544-1300  
Sonoma - 938-8508  
Spanish line - 829-1272  
Al-Anon/Alateen Family Groups - 575-6760  
Spanish meetings in Sonoma County - 763-0183  
**Narcotics Anonymous 24-hour helpline**  
[www.sonomacountyana.org](http://www.sonomacountyana.org). 575-7837

### About First 5 Sonoma County

**First 5 Sonoma County** funds children's health insurance and programs that improve childcare quality, help children succeed in school, and help parents provide safe and nurturing environments for their children. For more information on **First 5 Sonoma County** and its programs, please call 565-6626 or visit [www.first5sonomacounty.org](http://www.first5sonomacounty.org)