

# Frequently Asked Questions Opioids, Pregnancy and Breastfeeding

## 1. What are opioids?

Opioids are drugs often used to relieve pain. Some are prescription medications (such as hydromorphone, oxycodone, and fentanyl) and others are unregulated substances (street drugs such as heroin). The use of opioids, regardless of their source, can cause serious harm, including dependence, overdose, and death.

## 2. How can you tell if your opioid use is becoming a problem?

If you use opioids often, they can cause changes to your brain and lead to dependence. Signs that opioid use is becoming a problem include a strong desire for opioids, withdrawal symptoms if you stop using them, and use that causes other problems in your life, including at work, school, and home.

## 3. Are opioids safe to use during pregnancy?

Using opioids during pregnancy carries risks for both you and your baby. Taking opioids while pregnant may reduce your baby's growth, increase the chance that your baby is born early, or even cause miscarriage or stillbirth.

## 4. Should I try to stop using opioids during pregnancy?

Quitting or "detoxing" on your own during pregnancy is not recommended. Quitting without proper support and care can be harmful for you and your baby. Talk to a health care provider about the safest options for you.

## 5. How is opioid use managed during pregnancy?

Opioid use and dependence can be managed successfully in pregnancy using opioid substitutes (methadone or buprenorphine) and prenatal care that includes support and counselling. Proper treatment helps prevent withdrawal and overdose, manages cravings, and improves your health and the health of your baby.

## 6. Can the effects of opioids be passed onto your baby?

Opioids travel across the placenta to the baby. This means that babies exposed to opioids during pregnancy may have temporary withdrawal symptoms after birth. These symptoms are common and treatable.

## 7. I have a history of opioid use. Can I still get medication to manage pain during labour?

If you are currently taking opioids or being treated for opioid use, it is safe to use opioids to manage pain in labour. Medications used to manage pain in labour will not cause overdose or relapse. It is important to tell your health care provider if you are using opioids so you can work together to make an informed choice about the best way to manage pain.

## 8. Can I breastfeed while using opioids?

Breastfeeding is encouraged and safe for most women using opioids. But if you are using unregulated opioids, it is safest not to breastfeed because of a high risk of contamination in these drugs. To be cautious, you should speak to a health care provider about your particular use and situation.

## 9. I think my opioid use is becoming a problem. How do I ask for help?

If you think you might be dependent on prescription or unregulated opioids, it is important to talk to a health care provider about support and services in the community that can help you. Opioid use and dependence are treatable.

## 10. Will my baby be taken away if I'm honest about my opioid use?

If you are getting opioid substitute treatment, this cannot be reported to child protective services without your consent. Child protective services are also increasingly supportive of women in treatment for opioid use. It is important that you are honest about your opioid use and work together with your health care provider to make sure you get stable, supportive care for you and your baby.

