

# Caffeine, Smoking, Vaping, Alcohol, Other Substances and Breastfeeding or Chestfeeding

## Can I Breastfeed or Chestfeed if I Take Medication?

Most medications, including most antibiotics, are safe to use. But some – including some herbal products and anything containing codeine, like Tylenol 3 – may harm your baby.

### If you take or are considering medication

Check with your pharmacist or health care provider or talk with a HealthLink BC pharmacist at 8-1-1 to learn if any medication, herbal remedy or supplement you're currently taking or considering is safe to take while breastfeeding or chestfeeding.

## Can I Breastfeed or Chestfeed if I Have Caffeine?

Many people have some caffeine when they're breastfeeding or chestfeeding. But some babies are sensitive to it and may become restless or fussy – especially when they're younger.

### If you have caffeine

Limit your caffeine to 300 mg per day – about 2 cups/500 ml of coffee or 4 cups/1000 ml of tea. And remember that other things – like pop, energy and sports drinks, over-the-counter medicines and chocolate – also have caffeine.

## Can I Breastfeed or Chestfeed if I Smoke, and/or Vape Tobacco?

It's best for you and your baby if you stop smoking. But breastfeeding or chestfeeding is still important for your baby's health, and many parents who smoke do breastfeed or chestfeed successfully. Breastfeeding or chestfeeding may even help protect your baby from some of the negative effects of being exposed to tobacco smoke.

Smoking may:

- affect your milk production and let-down reflex
- make your baby fussy
- affect your baby's sleep
- put your baby at greater risk of ear infections, asthma and sleep-related infant death (see [Sleep](#))

For more information on commercial or ceremonial tobacco use, see [Nicotine or commercial tobacco](#).



### DID YOU KNOW?

Vaping exposes your baby to harmful chemicals like nicotine and solvents. You can still breastfeed or chestfeed, but talk with your health care provider or call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1 to learn how you can lower the risk.

## If you smoke, vape or both

Reduce your baby's exposure to smoking or vaping's harmful chemicals by:

- smoking or vaping only *right after* breastfeeding or chestfeeding
- smoking or vaping less or using a nicotine patch
- keeping your home and car smoke- or vape-free
- if you've smoked or vaped, washing your hands and changing your clothes before you hold your baby
- smoking or vaping outside only, while wearing a jacket you keep outside and only wear when you're smoking or vaping
- not bedsharing with your baby (see [Sleep](#))

For information on how to quit or reduce the amount you smoke or vape, visit [quitnow.ca](#), talk with your health care provider or call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1.

## Can I Breastfeed or Chestfeed if I Drink Alcohol?

The safest choice is not to drink alcohol while breastfeeding, chestfeeding or expressing milk. It takes about 2 hours for alcohol from one standard drink to leave your body and your milk. A standard drink once in a while may be okay if planned. (See [Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health](#) for what a standard drink looks like.)

Alcohol can:

- harm your baby's brain development, growth, and sleep
- decrease the amount of milk you produce
- decrease the amount of milk your baby drinks
- shorten the duration you can breastfeed or chestfeed
- increase your baby's risk of low blood sugar
- affect your judgment and ability to care for your baby

### If you drink alcohol

By planning ahead, you can lower your risks and risks to your baby:

- stick to one standard drink.
- feed (or express and store milk) before drinking.
- wait 2-3 hours per drink before feeding or expressing milk again.
- throw away any milk expressed within 2-3 hours of drinking.

For more information, see [Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health](#) or talk with your health care provider. Call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1 for more help.



#### BE AWARE

It takes time for your body to get rid of the alcohol in your milk. And pumping, drinking a lot of water, resting or drinking coffee doesn't make it happen any faster. Any milk that you pump while drinking or in the 2 to 3 hours after drinking should be thrown away.

## Can I Breastfeed or Chestfeed if I Use Cannabis (Marijuana)?

The safest option is to not use cannabis while breastfeeding or chestfeeding. Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) in cannabis is stored in human milk and can be passed on to your baby. And because THC remains for so long in the body, expressing and discarding or throwing your milk away ("pumping and dumping") doesn't make it safe for your baby, either. Even cannabidiol (CBD) hasn't been proven safe while breastfeeding or chestfeeding. Cannabis can also make you drowsy and unable to respond to your baby's needs.

Breastfeeding or chestfeeding has many health benefits for both the baby and the parent. If you're finding it difficult to stop using cannabis, discuss with your health care provider about steps you can take to help protect you and your baby.



#### DID YOU KNOW?

Whether smoked, vaped, applied to the skin or ingested (as edibles, drinks, oils or pills), no amount of cannabis is known to be safe if you breastfeed or chestfeed.



#### KEY TAKEAWAY

To protect your child, avoid exposing them to smoke from cannabis, vaping, e-cigarettes and cigarettes, both during pregnancy and after birth.

## Can I Breastfeed or Chestfeed if I Use Non-Prescription Opioids and Stimulants?

Non-prescription opioids and stimulants can pass through your milk and affect your baby.

### If you use non-prescription opioids and stimulants

Talk with a trusted health care provider, public health nurse or pharmacist, or call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1 to get support and information about how to safely feed your baby.



#### KEY TAKEAWAY

If you have more than 1 standard alcoholic drink per day, smoke, use cannabis or take non-prescription opioids and stimulants, talk with a trusted health care provider, public health nurse or pharmacist, or call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1. They can help you make the best feeding decision for your baby.



#### DANGER

Ensure all alcohol, cannabis, tobacco, medications and non-prescription opioids and stimulants are kept out of baby's reach (see [Baby Safety](#)).