

ALCOHOL

Alcohol is a drug and crosses the placenta to the baby. The occasional drink would not harm the baby but a heavy drinker could cause the baby to be born addicted. Alcohol may be thought of as a tonic or a pleasure, but it is a drug.

Alcohol risks

Alcohol can cross the placenta (afterbirth) and get into your baby's bloodstream. Studies have found that babies of heavy drinkers may be born with a range of severe handicaps known as *foetal alcohol syndrome*.

The more a mother drinks, the greater the risk to her baby. Occasional 'binges' are particularly dangerous. The latest Department of Health advice is that expectant mothers, and women hoping to become pregnant, should limit their drinking to one or two units once or twice a week. (One unit of alcohol equals half a pint of ordinary beer, or a small glass of sherry, or a glass of wine, or a single measure of spirits.)



When you smoke you are passing on a harmful chemical - nicotine which increases the baby's heartbeat and carbon monoxide which replaces oxygen in the baby's blood.

HEALTH HAZARDS

Smoking

Smoking involves the transfer of carbon monoxide and nicotine from your circulation to your baby's blood, and reduces the amount of oxygen and nourishment your baby receives.

Smoking risks for babies

- Research suggests that smoking during pregnancy is a major cause of growth failure, kidney defects and low birthweight;

DRUGS

DISEASES

When the word 'drug' is used, it usually refers to a habit-forming (addictive) substance which affects the mind. Examples are Cannabis, LSD, Ecstasy and the fumes from some solvents and glues. If taken by a pregnant woman these drugs may cross the placenta and may cause the baby to be deformed, or to be born addicted to the drug.

Drugs of abuse

If you use illegal drugs such as heroin, cocaine or amphetamines during pregnancy, you are putting your baby at risk. These increase the chance of miscarriage or stillbirth. Or your baby may be born prematurely or addicted to the drug. Ask your doctor to refer you for specialist help, so that you can be weaned off drug abuse as quickly as possible. *It is not advisable to stop addictive drugs suddenly;* a specialist obstetrician warns.

Some medicines are harmful to the baby. So check with the doctor before taking any medicines.

Excessive amounts of vitamins, particularly vitamins A, D and C, can also be dangerous. So do not take supplements without your doctor's approval. Don't eat liver or liver products. Their high vitamin A content may have a toxic effect on the baby.

Medicines during pregnancy

Because some drugs can cause birth defects and other problems, particularly in the early months of pregnancy, you should not take any medicine which has not been prescribed for you. But if you need to take regular medication for any reason, don't stop taking this without consulting your doctor. In such cases, lack of treatment may be more harmful than any risk due to the drug.

Some medicines may be perfectly safe most of the time, but unsuitable before you conceive or while you are pregnant.

DISEASES

Rubella -
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Rubella - German measles - dangerous in the first four months of pregnancy. The baby maybe born deaf, blind, mentally handicapped and have heart abnormalities.

## CHILDHOOD INFECTIONS

Rubella (German measles) is a common infection which poses a serious threat to the foetus, if contracted in the early months. Pregnant women are usually tested for immunity. If you are not immune, you can be vaccinated after your baby is born.

Symptoms are usually mild. But infection occurring for the first time during pregnancy may lead to miscarriage, stillbirth or brain damage for the baby. A blood test can tell if you are immune or if you are suffering from the illness.

Chicken pox - most women are immune to this disease. Pregnant women should all avoid adults with shingles as this is caused by the same virus.

Chickenpox usually is a mild illness in childhood. But an attack in pregnancy may cause serious complications for mother and baby, if not treated promptly. Chickenpox can be serious for a baby who contracts it around the time of birth.

Chicken-pox  
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Chicken-pox - if caught during pregnancy it makes the mother ill and can affect the baby.

Animal Infections

Contact with cats faeces and with sheep cause infections in the mother and unborn baby.

ANIMAL INFECTIONS

Sheep infection: Pregnant women should avoid contact with ewes and newborn lambs. Infection which causes ewes to miscarry can affect human mothers. There is also a risk of *toxoplasmosis*.

Toxoplasmosis: Caused by swallowing the eggs of a parasite. These may be spread by cats, sheep, unpasteurised goat's milk and products, contaminated garden soil, vegetables and fruit, raw or under-cooked meat, and poor hygiene.

Contact your doctor at once if you have sore throat, headache, swollen glands, fever, fatigue and aching muscles. Wear rubber gloves when gardening or changing cat litter, and wash hands and gloves thoroughly afterwards. Wash your hands after handling raw meat. Wash all soil traces from vegetables.

Toxoplasmosis Trust HELPLINE:
0171-713 0599.

Listeriosis - if caught similar to flu symptoms but can cause miscarriages, still births or severe illness to the unborn baby. Foods to avoid -

! Soft cheeses e.g. Brie, Camembert, Pates
Cook-Chill-meats unless they are piping hot. Meat that is not cooked properly e.g. Chicken.

HIV and Aids.

ways of passing HIV from person to person.

1. Through Sexual intercourse
2. Cut in the skin
3. Sharing infected needles.

Current evidence suggests that an HIV positive mother in good health and without symptoms of the disease is unlikely to be adversely affected by pregnancy. However, one in eight children born to HIV positive mothers is likely to be infected. HIV positive mothers may also pass on the virus through breast milk.

AIDS

AIDS (the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is caused by Human Immune-deficiency Virus (HIV) infection. This damages the body's immune system and after a number of years, may cause a range of illnesses known as AIDS. If a pregnant woman has the HIV virus, there is a 10 per cent risk that her baby will be affected. But research in France and the United States has shown that *the baby can be protected by giving certain anti-AIDS drugs to an expectant mother who is HIV-positive.*