It is important to discuss all medications, both prescribed and over the counter, with your doctor during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

Alcohol use

- No amount of alcohol use during pregnancy or while trying to get pregnant is safe
- All types of alcohol are equally harmful, including all wines and beer
- The baby’s brain is developing throughout pregnancy and even small amounts of alcohol can result in Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD), which are brain disorders related to alcohol use
- The effects of alcohol can last throughout your baby’s life, causing difficulties with motor coordination, emotional control, schoolwork, socialization and holding a job

Tobacco use

- Smoking may have an impact on fertility
- Nicotine causes blood vessels to narrow, so less oxygen and fewer nutrients reach your baby
- Nicotine also damages a baby’s brain and lungs – this damage is permanent
- There is a greater risk of stillbirth, with the highest risk found among the heaviest smokers

What about secondhand smoke?

- Secondhand smoke can increase the risk of having a low birth weight baby – a low birth weight puts the baby at risk for poor health later in life
- Babies who are exposed to secondhand smoke have an increased risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)
- Babies who are exposed to secondhand smoke are more likely to have asthma attacks and ear infections
- There is a 2.1 times greater risk of stillbirth when you are exposed to secondhand smoke

Opioid use

- Opioids are a type of medication that relieves pain and include oxycodone, hydromorphone, hydrocodone and codeine
- You and your doctor should discuss the risks and benefits of opioid medications prior to and during pregnancy and after childbirth
- When taken under a doctor’s care, opioids are safe for both you and your baby
- It is important to take the medication only as prescribed

What about marijuana?

- The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recommends against using marijuana while trying to get pregnant, during pregnancy and while you are breastfeeding
- Smoking marijuana might increase the levels of carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide in the blood, which may reduce the oxygen supply to your baby
- There is an increased risk of your baby having a low birth weight when you smoke marijuana

Where can I get help to reduce or stop using tobacco, alcohol, illegal drugs or prescription medication(s)?

There are many beneficial treatments available for service members and their family members. Talk with your obstetrician or other health care provider about what treatment options are available and what will be most helpful for you and your baby.

The treatment that is best for you depends on the substance you are using, your personal characteristics and your preferences.

E-cigarettes contain harmful nicotine and are not safe substitutes for cigarettes and should not be used during pregnancy.
References


DoD/VA Resources

The Purple Book
A complete guide to pregnancy in the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense

Military OneSource
Provides 24/7 support and information on housing, financial, legal, medical and psychological services
Stateside 800-342-9647
Overseas 800-3429-6477 or collect 484-530-5908
www.militaryonesource.mil

My HealtheVet
An online system for Veterans to manage and track their health care
www.myhealth.va.gov

Psychological Health Center of Excellence
Provides policies and evidence-based information and resources on psychological health
http://www.pdhealth.mil/resource-center

External Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Provides current evidence-based medical recommendations
https://www.cdc.gov/pregnancy/index.html

National Institute on Drug Abuse
Provides research and resources on the causes and consequences of drug use and addiction
www.drugabuse.gov

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism
Provides information on treatment for alcohol addiction and fetal alcohol exposure
www.niaaa.nih.gov

Clinical Guidance for Treating Pregnant and Parenting Women With Opioid Use Disorder and Their Infants
This guide provides national guidance for the management of pregnant and parenting women with opioid use disorder
www.samhsa.gov

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
Provides medical information on tobacco, alcohol, drugs and pregnancy
https://www.acog.org/Patients

The guideline is available at https://www.healthquality.va.gov. Army, Navy and Air Force facilities can order copies of this brochure and guideline at https://www.qmo.amedd.army.mil

Is Your Body Ready for Pregnancy?

Pregnancy and Substance Use: It’s Not Worth the Risk

Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense employees who use this information are responsible for considering all applicable regulations and policies throughout the course of care.