

## Remember...

This information is general. Effects of drug and alcohol use are different for every pregnancy and every infant, depending on reasons such as:

- amount used
- if other drugs are used, and which ones
- when in the pregnancy the drugs are used
- mother's general health
- other risks in the baby's environment

It helps you and your baby if you cut back or stop using cocaine at any point in your pregnancy.

### For more information about the effects of cocaine use during pregnancy, call:

- your doctor
- a public health nurse
- an alcohol and drug counsellor
- Motherrisk infoline (confidential counselling)  
Toll Free 1-877-327-4636

#### Sheway

369 Hawks Avenue, Vancouver, B.C.  
Phone: 604-658-1200

#### A/D Information Line

Phone: 604-660-9382  
1-800-663-1441

#### Detox Access Line

Phone: 604-658-1250

#### Pender Clinic

59 W. Pender  
Phone: 604-669-9181

#### 3-Bridges Community Health Centre

1292 Hornby Street, Vancouver  
Phone: 604-736-9844

#### Community Aboriginal Health Advocate:

Phone: 604-873-1833

#### Mental Health Liaison Worker

Phone: 604-872-6723

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# Cocaine Use During Pregnancy

## Effects on Mother and Baby



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## How does cocaine work?

Cocaine is a drug taken from the leaves of the coca shrub. It may be injected, smoked, snorted, or rubbed on membranes such as the gums. Cocaine heightens alertness and intense feelings of energy. At the same time, it narrows blood vessels, leading to increased blood pressure, higher heart rate, rapid breathing, and less blood flow to the uterus.

## What are the effects of cocaine for the pregnant woman?

Cocaine narrows the blood vessels and causes many complications during pregnancy. These may include:

- chance of miscarriage
- increased blood pressure
- poor appetite
- abruptio placenta (pulling away of the placenta from the uterus wall)
- premature rupture of membranes (bag of water breaking too early)
- precipitous (sudden) delivery

## What are the effects of prenatal cocaine use on the baby?

Much is still unknown about the effects. Factors such as prenatal care, nutrition, and mother's general health are also important for the baby's health.

However, there are two main groups of possible effects. The first is caused by narrowing of the blood vessels. Not enough oxygen gets to the fetus during important periods of development.

Effects may include:

- lower birth weight
- smaller head size
- increased risk of bleeding in the brain

The second group of effects is due to the direct effect of cocaine on the baby's developing nervous system.

This may result in:

- tremors
- a high-pitched cry
- floppiness or stiffness in muscles
- irritability and problems settling
- feeding problems
- being easily stressed by surroundings
- trouble paying attention

Babies exposed prenatally to cocaine are also at greater risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

## What about breastfeeding?

Cocaine is transferred into breastmilk. Breastfeeding is usually not recommended if the mother is regularly using cocaine.

## What are the outcomes for children?

Few studies have followed cocaine-exposed children past childhood. Effects that have been reported in the research include:

- more difficulty in paying attention
- lower verbal skills
- difficulty controlling emotion

It is important to note that there can be many other things that affect outcomes, such as parenting skills, home environment, and nutritional concerns. These factors may be more important than the drug exposure itself.