

BEST PRACTICES Human Milk and Substance Exposure



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SUBSTANCE	BEST PRACTICES	EVIDENCE	REFERENCE
<div>Alcohol</div>	Pump or feed before you drink. Wait 2 hours after each alcohol serving before providing milk to the baby. ^{1, 2}	Alcohol is present in human milk and has been linked to many of the same problems seen with prenatal exposure. Alcohol does not increase milk production or let-down. ^{1, 2}	<div>1. ABM (2023)) 2. LactMed (2025) 3. Uguz (2021) 4. AAP (2013) 5. AAP (2012) 6. ACOG (2017) 7. Reece-Stretman and Marinelli (2015) 8. Hill and Reed (2013) 9. Metz and Stickrath (2013) 10. Perez-Reyes (1982) 11. Bertrand (2018) 12. D'Apolito (2013) 13. Astley and Little (1990) 14. NIDA (1985) 15. Darke, et al. (2007) 16. LactMed 17. ABM (2012) 18. Bartu, Dusci, and Ilett (2008) 19. LLL (2006) 20. Temple, et al. (2017) 21. Dorea (2007) 22. Vennemenn, et al. (2009) 23. Napierala (2016)</div>
<div>Benzodiazepines</div>	Take medication as prescribed. Feed the baby. ³ Watch for signs of sedation. ⁴	Most benzodiazepines are considered safe or moderately safe at therapeutic doses. ³ Infants exposed to benzodiazepines via breastmilk may exhibit signs of sedation, such as apnea. ⁴	
<div>Cannabis</div>	It is safest to reduce or eliminate use during the lactation period. ^{5, 6, 7} However, in the case of continued medical or recreational use, experts agree that the proven benefits of human milk likely outweigh the risk of cannabis exposure. It is unacceptable to withhold lactation support. ^{8, 9}	Cannabis transfer rate into human milk is estimated to be 0.8-1% of maternal dose. ^{8, 10, 11, 12} Bioavailability is incomplete in infants' GI tract. So infants absorb 0.1% of the parent's dose. ¹¹ Little data on the effects of exposure via breast milk, with inconclusive results. ^{13, 14}	
<div>Opioids</div>	Long- or short-term opiate use is not a contraindication to breastfeeding, regardless of dose. ^{15, 16} Because of individual differences in metabolism, codeine is not recommended while breastfeeding, due to risk of infant overdose. ¹⁶	Most opioids transfer into human milk at rates estimated at 1-3 % of maternal dose. ¹⁷ Because bioavailability is poor in infants' gastrointestinal tracts, it is likely that even less is absorbed.	
<div>Stimulants</div>	Abstinence during lactation is recommended. In the case of a relapse, wait 24 hours after cocaine use and 48 hours after methamphetamine use to provide milk. ^{16, 18} Caffeine doses of ≤ 200mg are considered safe for lactation. ¹⁹	Caffeine, cocaine, and methamphetamine are present in the human milk of parents who use them. Infant exposure should be limited by feeding or pumping before use. ^{16, 18, 19, 20}	
<div>Smoking</div>	Despite the risks, breast/chestfeeding while smoking is considered safer than formula feeding while smoking because of the proven health benefits of human milk, including a 50% reduction in the incidence of SIDS. ^{5, 21, 22}	Smoking during lactation has been associated with decreased milk supply, shorter lactation duration, altered composition of milk, increased incidence of SIDS, and asthma in offspring. ^{5, 23}	





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