

Is cannabis safe to use while pregnant?

No, you cannot eat or use many foods and medicines while pregnant because they might harm the baby. This is the same for cannabis, as it contains a chemical THC (tetrahydrocannabinol). This is the main chemical in cannabis that has mood and thought altering effects and is also known to negatively affect stem cell development and neuron connections. These processes are happening when a baby is developing in-utero. There is no known safe amount of cannabis use during pregnancy.

Can cannabis be good for your baby?

No. Recent studies have shown that when cannabis is used during pregnancy, it can result in babies being born with lower birth weight. This increases the chance of babies with low birth weight having trouble eating, gaining weight and fighting off infections. Some research also shows that cannabis exposure in-utero can affect children's learning and attention as they develop, and these effects may not appear until adolescence.

Cannabis is natural, so it must be safe?

Not all natural substances or plants are safe. Tobacco, poisonous berries and certain types of mushrooms are some examples. Cannabis is a plant that contains THC which may be harmful for you and your baby.

What about eating or vaping cannabis instead?

It is important to remember that your baby is still exposed to THC, and the risks that go with it, no matter how you take cannabis. There are also risks for your health from vaping, especially when cannabis is combined with additives and flavourings that may be harmful to the lungs.

What about using cannabis when breastfeeding?

Breastfeeding has many health benefits for both the baby and mother. Any THC consumed by the mother enters the breast milk and can be passed from the mother's milk to her baby. THC is stored in body fat and babies have a high percentage of body fat, including in their developing brain. Because THC is stored in fat it remains in the body for a long time.

What about cannabis and your health?

There are well-documented risks to health from short and long-term use of cannabis. These risks include its effects on short-term memory, attention, hallucinations and impaired perception. Cannabis also slows reaction time which can affect driving and increase the risk of motor vehicle accidents, causing injuries and death. Using cannabis can increase the chances of developing mental health problems, such as psychosis and schizophrenia. There is also a risk of developing dependence on the substance. Cannabis is also linked with female and male reproductive problems. Regular cannabis smoking is associated with chronic cough and phlegm. Bear in mind that some of these effects can also affect your ability to care for your baby.

Some people use cannabis as a medicine. Does that mean it is safe?

Cannabis can be prescribed by a doctor in some special cases through the Controlled Access Scheme in Australia, for some medical conditions. A doctor can decide if the benefits outweigh the risks. The safest option is to talk this over with your doctor.

What about cannabis as a treatment for nausea during pregnancy?

Some women report relief from morning sickness when using cannabis during pregnancy, but we also don't understand all the risks. There are other safer options available. Speak to your health care provider before trying cannabis for morning sickness.

What about cannabis as a treatment for pain relief?

If you already use cannabis for pain relief, it is best to speak to your health care provider about what other options there are to keep you and your baby healthy and safe.



Lower Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines

Plain Language Summary adapted for use from American Journal of Public Health

Recommendation 1:

The most effective way to avoid any risks of cannabis use is to not use cannabis at all (abstain).

Recommendation 2:

Delay cannabis use as long as possible. People who use cannabis before the age of 16 are at greater risk of health problems.

Recommendation 3:

Know the type of cannabis you're using. Use cannabis with low THC to reduce the risk of mental health problems.

Recommendation 4:

Avoid synthetic cannabis. Synthetic cannabis chemicals are unpredictable and can be very dangerous.

Recommendation 5:

Avoid smoking cannabis. Eat cannabis or use a vaporizer instead. These methods take longer for you to feel the effects, so be careful with how much you take. (DEN suggests caution with this recommendation. There is new evidence of the harms of vaping when additives and flavourings are used.)

Recommendation 6:

Don't inhale cannabis too deeply or hold it in your lungs for a long time. This increases the risk of lung problems.

Recommendation 7:

Use cannabis only occasionally. Try to avoid using it more than once or twice a week.

Recommendation 8:

Don't use cannabis and drive. Wait at least 6 hours after using cannabis before driving a car or operating any machinery.

Recommendation 9:

If you are pregnant, have a history of drug addiction, or a family history of schizophrenia or psychosis, it is safest not to use cannabis at all.

Recommendation 10:

If you use cannabis, reduce the number of risks as much as possible. Follow as many of these recommendations as you can.