

# Helping you to care for yourself and your baby

Maternity department



01935 475 122  
[yeovilhospital.nhs.uk](http://yeovilhospital.nhs.uk)

The logo for Yeovil Hospital Healthcare, featuring a stylized 'Y' inside a circle with a rainbow-colored border.  
Yeovil Hospital  
Healthcare

## Congratulations on your pregnancy and welcome to Yeovil Women's Hospital

At Yeovil Hospital we recognise that some pregnant women and their partners require extra support during their pregnancy to help them make choices around their substance/alcohol/medication use to minimise the risk to their baby. We aim to provide this support in a sensitive and non-judgemental manner.

We feel that it is important that you know how the substances and medication that you use may affect your baby. This will enable you to make an informed decision on how best to protect both yourself and your baby.

No mum-to-be ever wishes to harm her baby. If substances or alcohol have become a part of your life or if you are still in treatment for a previous problem, we can help you plan a safer pregnancy.

### This booklet tells you about:

- Where to get help and support for you and your family
- The possible effects of substances/alcohol/medication on you and your baby

### Where do I get help and who do I need to tell?

At Yeovil Hospital we have a small and dedicated team of midwives who provide specialist care for women who misuse substances/alcohol or who are taking prescribed medication which may affect their baby. This is called the Acorn Team. Your team midwife can refer you to the Acorn Team.

**Alternatively you can contact them yourself on:**

**01935 384 242  
acornteam@ydh.nhs.uk**

It is advisable to make contact with the specialist midwives as soon as you can. The sooner this is done the sooner the right help and support can be arranged for you.

The specialist midwife will be able to provide information about the effects of the substances/alcohol/medications you are taking on your pregnancy.

She will also be able to refer you to drug treatment services if necessary and help you to prepare for your baby by giving advice around withdrawal and what to expect.

## The effects of substances / alcohol / medication on you and your baby

### Tobacco and cannabis

Smoking cigarettes can be harmful to babies and children. Smoking tobacco is linked to many complications in pregnancy including miscarriage, premature birth, stillbirth, low birth weight and cot death.

Research on cannabis use suggests it has a significant risk to mental health. The risk may be higher the younger you start using it. Cannabis will cross the placenta, like tobacco. We also advise you not to expose children to passive smoking.

### Alcohol

There is no proven safe level for alcohol consumption during pregnancy, the only risk-free approach is to avoid alcohol completely - during pregnancy, when trying to conceive and when breastfeeding.

There is no evidence to show that it is safe to drink any amount of alcohol during pregnancy, including low level drinking. High levels of alcohol use can reduce your baby's birth weight, while among women who drink heavily in pregnancy (especially binge drinkers) there is a risk of their babies exhibiting 'Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder' (FASD). This is made up of a combination of features including

reduction in growth (eg. head circumference and brain size), central nervous dysfunction, learning difficulties and facial abnormalities.

It is important not to suddenly stop drinking if you have been drinking very often or heavily or are dependent on alcohol. This can be harmful for you and your baby. It is important you get the right treatment to help you cut down or stop the amount you drink.

### Stimulants (eg. cocaine, amphetamines, ecstasy)

Some stimulants affect blood flow in the uterus so they can be very dangerous for babies and mothers. We recommend you avoid using stimulants when pregnant.

#### The risks include:

- Heart attack and stroke (for the mother)
- Miscarriage or early labour.
- Severe bleeding inside the womb which can be very serious for you and your baby.
- Low birth weight.
- Problems with baby's development including organs and limbs.
- Bleeding into the brain (baby)

After baby is born they may suffer with neonatal intoxication rather than withdrawal – jitteriness, irritability, poor feeding and an abnormal sleep pattern.

### Benzodiazepines (eg. Diazepam, Temazepam)

Taking benzodiazepines in pregnancy has been associated with a higher risk of miscarriage and some studies have linked it to the formation of a cleft palate (where the roof of the baby's mouth does not form properly). However, this has been disproved by other studies.

When the doses of benzodiazepines have been high in pregnancy there is a risk that, when born, baby may have difficulty maintaining its temperature, may have reduced muscle tone and may experience fits as it withdraws.

The withdrawal period for a baby after exposure to benzodiazepines can be lengthy and baby may require admission to the special care baby unit if this occurs.

It is important that you do not suddenly stop taking benzodiazepines if you take them regularly as this could be harmful to your health. It is advisable to seek help and support from your GP or drug services to do this.

### Opiates (eg. heroin, morphine, codeine, cocodamol)

Do not suddenly stop taking your usual amounts of opiates, whether that is heroin, prescribed methadone, or prescribed codeine. Suddenly stopping can lead to withdrawal for yourself but also for your unborn baby.

Bad withdrawals could lead to miscarriage at any time in pregnancy. If you wish to reduce your drug use or your prescription speak to your GP or drug treatment service as soon as possible.

If pregnant women use heroin, their babies can be born early and can be too small for their number of weeks. They are also at increased risk of cot death.

Babies born to mothers who have been taking opiates in pregnancy are at risk of withdrawing from the opiates once they are born. This might mean that they need to spend time on the maternity unit or SCBU being monitored or treated. This can last several weeks depending on the severity of the withdrawal.

### New psychoactive substances or 'legal highs'

Very little is known about the effects of legal highs on pregnancy. Therefore, it is recommended you stop using these during pregnancy. As with all substances your pregnancy will most likely be monitored more closely to ensure your baby is growing well in the womb.

The specialist midwives will be in contact with you throughout

your pregnancy and will support you to make decisions about your pregnancy. They will also help you to plan your birth and inform you about ways you can support your baby should they need treatment.

Please use this space for any notes you have

**Further information can be found online at:**

[www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com)

[www.somersetdap.org.uk](http://www.somersetdap.org.uk)

**If you would like this leaflet in another format or in a different language, please ask a member of staff.**

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