

What's the Deal with Marijuana and Breastfeeding?

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After a long day filled with diapers, spit-up and tears, mama deserves a little downtime. While some moms choose to unwind with a glass of wine, a yoga class or their favorite TV show, others turn to something slightly more medicinal in nature. And for others still, it's not necessarily about finding a way to relax but instead enjoying the occasional joint to help cope with anxiety, depression or sleep problems.

With more states legalizing marijuana every year, it's easy to assume that using the drug is perfectly safe. But are the rules different for nursing moms? Here's what you need to know about marijuana and breastfeeding.

What do the experts say? "The American Academy of Pediatrics, American College of Obstetrics and Gynecologists and FDA all strongly advise against the use of marijuana while breastfeeding," explains Rebeca Aggi, a private lactation consultant in Los Angeles. She also discourages moms from smoking weed, citing studies that show that marijuana use during breastfeeding may have negative effects on the developing brain.

That's because the chemicals of the drug do in fact pass into breast milk. [Dr. Jarret](#), a pediatrician in Pennsylvania, explains: "We know that marijuana and Tetrahydrocannabinol or THC, the psychoactive component that makes you 'high,' have an affinity towards fats. There is a good amount of fat in breast milk so the THC does cross into the breast milk and will affect your baby."

And while alcohol will leave breast milk at the same rate it leaves the mother's blood (roughly one drink per hour), marijuana can accumulate in breast milk. [One 2018 study](#) published in the journal *Pediatrics* found that low levels of the chemicals in marijuana could be found in breast milk up to six days after women had smoked pot or eaten an edible.

That's why Dr. Jarret recommends that mothers not use marijuana while breastfeeding, although he notes that the long-term effects aren't fully known.

In fact, there's actually very little research available about the effects of nursing moms and marijuana use on babies. While studies have linked marijuana use to [developmental problems](#) and [slow weight gain](#), they were small and didn't take long-term outcomes into consideration. They also did not factor in things like exposure to secondhand smoke, how much marijuana the women in the study actually used or how healthy the women were.

Because there is insufficient long-term data on the impact of infants exposed to marijuana via breast milk, most health professionals recommend that nursing mothers avoid it, citing the potential negative outcomes on the baby's development.

Another factor to consider? If an infant has a positive urine test for drugs, doctors are obligated to contact social services.

What about CBD and breastfeeding? [Cannabidiol \(CBD\)](#) is a chemical compound that comes from marijuana that doesn't contain "psychedelic" THC. "Although CBD has many bona-fide medical uses, its use in pregnancy and breastfeeding is not recommended," Dr. Jarret tells us. "The same link to behavioral and developmental abnormalities that have been seen with marijuana usage can be seen with CBD." Not to mention the fact that there are hundreds of unregulated CBD products on the market so it's hard to know exactly what you're ingesting. Your best bet? Play it safe and stay away from these products while pregnant or breastfeeding.

But what if I pump and dump? News flash: Pumping and dumping is [a nursing myth](#). That's because it won't actually get rid of potentially harmful substances (yep, even alcohol) in breast milk. Remember how long it takes for marijuana to leave your breast milk? Six days, according to one study. The only reason to ever pump and dump is if your breasts are feeling engorged and you're looking for relief.

Do the same rules apply for marijuana and pregnancy? Yep. Even though marijuana use during pregnancy in the U.S. has increased over the past 14 years (from 2.9 percent in 2002 to 5 percent in 2016), [per a national drug survey](#), experts strongly caution against it. [The FDA recently released the following statement](#): "FDA strongly advises against the use of cannabidiol (CBD), tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), and marijuana in any form during pregnancy or while breastfeeding."

Bottom line: More research is needed to determine what effects (if any) marijuana may have on breastfeeding babies. Until then, experts recommend that nursing moms take a cautious approach and avoid the drug. If you're using marijuana to manage stress, anxiety or sleep issues, speak with your healthcare provider about alternatives.