

Cannabis Use in Pregnancy

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About Cannabis

Cannabis is the most widely used illegal substance used in the U.K.

Cannabis is used by all ages though it is reported that frequent use is about twice as likely amongst young people.

It has different names including Hash, Grass or Weed, Skunk.

- Hash is a dark coloured lump of resin
- Grass is dried chopped leaves
- Skunk is a form of herbal cannabis which is the strongest of the others.

The risks for the person smoking cannabis are the same as someone who smokes tobacco, for example breathing and possible heart problems.

It is considered there is also a link to developing mental health problems if using cannabis, for example, depression, schizophrenia and bi-polar disorder. Teenagers are particularly vulnerable.

Cannabis is usually mixed with tobacco and can have the same effects as smoking on your pregnancy. This is because cannabis passes through the placenta and can affect your unborn baby's development. If you use cannabis whilst pregnant, your baby may be at risk of:

- Being born with a low birth weight
- Being admitted to the neonatal unit because of health concerns
- Feeding problems
- Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)
- Learning and behavioural difficulties

Do not forget to attend your Ante-Natal Appointment.

If you have problems attending contact your Midwife or the antenatal clinic on 0151 430 1016.

Remember - these services are here to help you.

Drugs and Pregnancy Information and Advice – Where to go

CGL (Change, Grow, Live) St. Helens (Drug Team)

Lincoln House,
80 Corporation Street,
St Helens, Merseyside,
WA10 1UG
Tel: 01744 410752

CGL (Change, Grow, Live) Knowsley (Drug Team)

Unit 12-14 Chapelbrook Park,
Wilson Road
Huyton
L36 6FH
Tel: 0151 482 6291

CGL Widnes

Aston Dane
Waterloo road
Widnes
WA8 0QR
Phone number: 0151 422 1400 option 1
Opening times Mon – Fri 09.00 – 17.00

CGL Runcorn

1st floor
75 High Street
Runcorn
WA7 1AF
Phone number 0151 422 1400 option 2
Opening times Mon – Fri 09.00 – 17.00

Amethyst Team

Whiston Hospital
Antenatal Clinic
Warrington Road,
Prescot,
Merseyside.
L35 5DR
Tel: 0151 426 1600
and ask for the Amethyst Team

Should I Stop Using Cannabis Now I Am Pregnant?

If you are not using cannabis regularly, it would be good to try and stop. If you think you may be addicted, then reducing may be better for you. Ask your Midwife or GP for advice. You can contact local drug services detailed above for advice and support.

In the past it was thought that cannabis was not addictive though current information suggests it can be addictive especially if used regularly.

Symptoms of being addicted include:

- tolerance (needing to increase the amount used to get the same effect)
- craving for it
- poor appetite
- weight loss
- difficulty sleeping
- aggression/irritability.

What happens when I go to hospital?

It is important for the staff to know which drugs you are taking so that there is no risk of you or your baby being over-dosed when given pain-relieving drugs in labour.

If you have been attending for ante-natal care then you will have had the opportunity to discuss how your pregnancy is progressing, labour, and the most suitable method of pain relief. If not, then you should consider talking to your Midwife or Doctor and telling them about your drug use so that they can help and advise you.

Labour can be a worrying time especially if this is your first baby, so do not be afraid to approach your Midwife for help and support.

She can discuss Parent craft classes with you, which are invaluable in providing you with information to prepare you for labour and parenthood.

How long will I be in hospital?

If you have used cannabis within the last month prior to the birth of your baby then the Paediatricians' (baby doctors) advice is that your baby needs to stay in hospital with you on the post-natal ward for a minimum of 24 hours. This is to make sure that your baby is not going to be ill through drug withdrawal. Not all babies are 'addicted' to the drugs their mum has been taking, but the Midwives and Doctors will give you and your baby the care, support and attention you both need.

Can I Breast Feed?

Chemicals from cannabis can be passed to your baby through breast milk. These chemicals are stored in fat and are slowly released over time, meaning your baby could still be exposed even after you stop using cannabis.

However, data on the effects of cannabis exposure to your baby through breast feeding are limited and conflicting. To limit potential risk to the infant, breastfeeding mothers should avoid cannabis use.

If you have been smoking cannabis regularly, the advice is to stop as soon as possible so you can breastfeed your baby.

Going home with your baby

When you and your baby are ready to go home, your individual needs will be assessed.

On your transfer home the Community Midwife is informed and will visit you the day after discharge from hospital. She will check you and your baby are well and give you any further advice you need. This is arranged for every mum going home with their baby. The Community Midwife will probably be the same one that you have previously seen at your GP surgery.

Contraception

You will have the opportunity to discuss contraception before going home and with your Community Midwife. You can also get help and advice from the Family Planning Clinics, your Health Visitor or your GP.

Useful websites

Cannabis: the facts

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/cannabis-the-facts/>

Honest Information about drugs – FRANK

<https://www.talktofrank.com>

Pregnancy, Alcohol & Drugs – healthline.com

<https://www.healthline.com/health/pregnancy/alcohol-drugs>

Whiston Hospital
Warrington Road,
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Telephone: 0151 426 1600

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www.sthk.nhs.uk