

Cannabis use in pregnancy and after birth

Other formats

If you need this leaflet in another format such as audio CD, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service:

- 01392 402093 (for Mid Devon, East Devon and Exeter services)
- 01271 314090 (for North Devon services)
- rduh.pals@nhs.net

Cannabis use in pregnancy and after birth

This leaflet provides clear and supportive information about cannabis use during pregnancy, after birth, and while breastfeeding. Cannabis can be consumed by smoking, vaping, or eating edibles. If you are prescribed cannabis for medical reasons, please let your prescriber know if you are pregnant. The information in this leaflet is still relevant for you.

What is Cannabis?

- Cannabis is the most commonly used illegal drug in the UK
- It acts as a depressant, slowing down messages between your brain and body, and can cause mild hallucinogenic effects.
- Other names include weed, grass, hash, and skunk.
 - **Hash** – a dark, solid resin.
 - **Grass** – dried and chopped leaves.
 - **Skunk** – a stronger herbal form.
- Modern cannabis often contains higher levels of (Tetrahydrocannabinol) THC (the chemical that causes a “high”), which increases the risk of dependence and side effects.
- Smoking cannabis releases **three times more tar** and **five times more carbon monoxide** than a tobacco cigarette.

Risks to your baby during pregnancy and birth

When you use cannabis, your baby is exposed too. THC crosses the placenta and can affect your baby's growth and brain development.

Possible risks include

- Low birth weight.
- Premature birth.
- Greater need for care in a neonatal unit.
- Higher risk of learning, behavioural, and mental health problems later in life.

If Cannabis is smoked with tobacco, there are added risks

- Stillbirth (about 47% higher risk).
- Miscarriage (about 32% higher risk).
- Premature birth (about 27% higher risk).
- Low birth weight (about double the risk).
- Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (about four times higher).

Sudden Infant Death (SIDS)

SIDS is the sudden, unexplained death of a baby under 12 months old. While the exact cause is unknown, following safe sleep advice as below reduces risk:

- Always place your baby on their back.
- Use a clear, flat, firm sleep space (cot, crib, or Moses basket) in your room.
- Keep the sleep space smoke-free.
- Avoid overheating.
- Do not co-sleep if you or your partner smoke, have taken alcohol, cannabis, or sedating medication, or if your baby was premature or low birth weight.

For more information: The Lullaby Trust
<https://www.lullabytrust.org.uk/>

Risks for you

Short-term effects: feeling faint, dizzy, tired; confusion; paranoia; panic attacks; poor concentration and coordination; increased appetite.

Long-term effects:

- Addiction and withdrawal symptoms (e.g., poor sleep, irritability, mood swings)
- Mental health issues (e.g., anxiety, depression)
- Lung conditions (bronchitis, cancer, especially if mixed with tobacco)
- Reduced fertility (affects sperm and ovulation)
- Increased risk of heart disease and stroke.

Risks to your newborn

Some babies exposed to cannabis during pregnancy may show withdrawal symptoms such as irritability, poor feeding, or unsettled behaviour. These may appear a week or more after birth.

If you are worried about your baby, contact your GP or midwife. In an emergency, call 999.

Breastfeeding and Cannabis

Breastfeeding is highly beneficial for you and your baby, but **cannabis is not recommended while breastfeeding:**

- THC passes into breast milk and can remain for **six days to six weeks** after use.
- Babies may become sleepy, weak, and have feeding difficulties.
- Possible effects on motor and brain development.

Parenting and Cannabis

Using cannabis can affect your ability to safely care for your baby or child:

- You may miss hunger, comfort, or safety cues.
- Your judgement and reactions may be slower.
- The effects can last several hours.

Always make sure someone who is **alert and sober** can look after your child.

Support and advice

Health professionals recommend avoiding cannabis while pregnant, breastfeeding, or caring for a baby.

If you are using cannabis:

- Talk to your midwife or GP – you will be supported **without judgement**.

For help with quitting, visit: Together - Find Support

<https://www.waythrough.org.uk/find-support-near-me/together/>

or ask your Midwife to refer you to this service.

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern, please contact PALS:

- 01392 402093 (for Mid Devon, East Devon and Exeter services)
- 01271 314090 (for North Devon services)
- rduh.pals@nhs.net

Have your say

Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

You can also share your feedback on the Care Opinion website at www.careopinion.org.uk or freephone 0800 122 3135.



Scan the QR code to visit the Care Opinion website →

Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
www.royaldevon.nhs.uk

The Trust cannot accept any responsibility for the accuracy of the information given if the leaflet is not used by Royal Devon staff undertaking procedures at the Royal Devon sites or in community settings.

© Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
This leaflet was designed by the Graphics Department.
www.royaldevon.nhs.uk/get-in-touch