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Cannabis use – the effects on you and your baby – a guide for parents

This leaflet contains information about the risks of cannabis use in pregnancy for you and your unborn baby. It also provides information about where you can get help to quit. It is important that you are open and honest about your cannabis use. Your midwife will continue to monitor your current use so that together, you can agree a safe plan of care for you and your baby.

What is cannabis?

Cannabis is the most widely used illegal street drug in the UK. It contains a substance called tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), which causes a 'high' but can also lead to problematic side effects. These include drowsiness, nausea and mental health issues, such as anxiety, paranoia and psychosis. Most cannabis found on the UK market has been found to have a very high level of THC and is stronger than cannabis smoked by previous generations.

Risks for you

There is evidence that using cannabis can trigger mental health issues, even if you have never experienced them before. It can also make any existing mental health issues worse. If you have used cannabis from a young age, you are more at risk of developing mental health issues due to the effect of THC on your developing brain.

Risks for your baby

THC is known to cross the placenta and may affect your unborn baby's development. Your baby is at increased risk of:

- Being born prematurely.
- Being born with a low birthweight.
- Learning, behavioural and mental health issues as they grow up, including substance misuse.

This is in addition to risks to your baby if you are smoking cannabis mixed with tobacco, including the reduction in oxygen and nutrition via the placenta as well as:

- Increased risk of miscarriage and stillbirth
- Increased risk of pregnancy and birth complications
- Increased risk of pre-term birth
- Increased risk of asthma/breathing conditions
- Increased risk of SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome)

As the healthcare professionals providing your maternity care, **we strongly recommend that you stop using cannabis.**

How can we help you?

We understand that it can be difficult to stop using cannabis when you are pregnant, especially if you have been using for a long time. This is why it is really important that you receive the right support.

Your midwife can refer you to the following services;

- Reading: Change Grow Live **Tel: 0118 955 7333**
- West Berkshire: Newbury V-I-A **Tel**: **0300 303 4554** or email west.berkshire@viaorg.uk
- Wokingham: Cranstoun Wokingham Substance Misuse **Tel: 0118 977 2022**

You will also have access to our specialist Mental Health Team and drug worker, if you feel that you would like some support with your mental health.

Information once your baby arrives

After they are born, some babies may be irritable, unsettled and have difficulties feeding for a period of time if you have been using cannabis during your pregnancy. This may mean that you need to stay in hospital a little longer to ensure baby settles and learns to feed effectively.

Breastfeeding

Cannabis can transfer through your breast milk to your baby. We therefore advise that **you stop using cannabis as soon as possible if you plan to breast feed.**

Keeping your baby safe

Please let your midwife know if you are experiencing any other issues that are affecting your life, for example, your relationships, money or housing. This is so we can help you to access the right support.

If you are struggling with your cannabis use and/or any other issues, we will need to consider how this is affecting you and your ability to meet your baby's needs. In some circumstances, this may result in your midwife making a referral to Children's Services. This is done in partnership with you to ensure that you and your baby are safe.

Further information

- https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/cannabis-the-facts/
- https://www.talktofrank.com/drug/cannabis
- https://www.lullabytrust.org.uk/safer-sleep-advice/smoking/
- https://www.rcog.org.uk/for-the-public/browse-our-patient-information/smoking-and-pregnancy-patient-information-leaflet/

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

RBFT Maternity, Poppy Team Lead MW, May 2021
Reviewed: May 2026. Next review due: May 2028.