

## Alcohol

You do not have to miss out on drinking alcohol whilst you are breastfeeding even though it passes quite freely into your breastmilk. There is no evidence that having an occasional drink will harm your baby. Alcohol levels are highest about 30-90 minutes after drinking so you may want to try to restrict your drinking until after your baby has fed. **Never put yourself in a situation where you may fall asleep with your baby (on a bed, chair or settee) if you have been drinking.** If you have had lots to drink (binge drinking) ask someone else to care for your baby as alcohol affects your ability to care safely for your baby, no matter how you are feeding. If you pass out or vomit from too much alcohol don't breastfeed until the following morning. You do not need to express to clear your milk of alcohol as it passes back into your bloodstream as your own blood levels fall. For your health you should not drink more than 14 units of alcohol spread out over the whole week.



## Smoking

Smoking is bad for your health. Smoking near your baby is harmful. Nicotine passes into your breastmilk and may give your baby colic or reduce your milk supply. But it is still worth breastfeeding even if you continue to smoke. Try to restrict smoking to after a feed so you reduce the amount of nicotine that reaches your breastmilk. If you want to give up now you can use nicotine replacement products such as gum and patches as your baby will get less nicotine that way.

**Why not take this chance to be healthy for both of you?**

*NB - Research shows exposure to smoke increases the risk of cot death in babies.*



## Patient Information Leaflets

Many patient information leaflets within packets of tablets say "do not take if you are breastfeeding". This does not necessarily mean that they will be harmful to your baby, just that the manufacturer has not conducted any trials. Governmental regulations allow them to opt out of taking responsibility for use during breastfeeding. If you are concerned please check the Drug Information Factsheets section of our website: [www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk](http://www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk) or call the Drugs in Breastmilk Helpline to check: 0844 412 4665.

**If someone tells you that you can't continue to breastfeed if you have to take a medicine, or for any other reason, ask for help. It may not be true or there may be a safer alternative.**

**REMEMBER BREASTFEEDING IS GOOD FOR YOU AND YOUR BABY**

**BfN** The Breastfeeding Network

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Written by Wendy Jones PhD, a primary care pharmacist with a special interest in the safety of drugs in breastmilk. The BfN Drugs in Breastmilk Helpline has been run on a voluntary basis since 1998. The information in this leaflet has been taken from a variety of reference sources and further information is available from the Helpline if required.

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[druginformation@breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk](mailto:druginformation@breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk)

Supporterline 0300 100 0210

National Breastfeeding Helpline 0300 100 0212  
(NBH calls connect you to your nearest BfN or ABM volunteer)

Calls to 0300 numbers cost no more than calls to UK numbers starting 01 and 02 and will be part of any inclusive minutes that apply to your provider and call package.

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



The Breastfeeding Network  
**How safe is...?**  
Alcohol, Smoking, Medicines  
and Breastfeeding

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# How safe is...?

## Alcohol, Smoking, Medicines and Breastfeeding

You may be told that you cannot take any medicines whilst you are breastfeeding. This isn't true. Many illnesses can be treated whilst you breastfeed without harming your baby even if the drug passes into your milk in small amounts.

You may notice packets of tablets say "don't take if you are pregnant or breastfeeding". This doesn't always mean they are unsafe just that the manufacturers do not have to say that they are safe.

If you are concerned call the BfN "Drugs in Breastmilk" Helpline and talk to people who know about breastfeeding and the safety of medicines on 0844 412 4665. You might need to leave a message on an answerphone but you will be called back.

You can also find information at the website: [www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/drugline.html](http://www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/drugline.html) or you can email: [druginformation@breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk](mailto:druginformation@breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk)

## you can...

- You can have your teeth filled if you need to
- You can have local anaesthetics
- You can have injections e.g. against MMR, tetanus
- You can have small operations
- You can have your hair coloured, permed or straightened
- You can have spray tans
- You can have false nails fitted
- You can take antacids
- You can take medicines to treat diarrhoea and vomiting – continuing to breastfeed will protect your baby against the infection
- You can use ointments for piles
- You can treat other children and yourself for headlice
- You can apply moisture creams.

### Contraception

Whilst you are breastfeeding you can use:

- Barrier methods of contraceptives e.g. Durex
- The mini pill
- Depo Provera injection
- The morning after pill

**AVOID** the combined oral contraceptive pill.



**Supporterline: 0300 100 0210**

**Drugs in Breastmilk Helpline:  
0844 412 4665**

Call charges

Calls to 0300 numbers cost no more than calls to UK numbers starting 01 and 02 and will be part of any inclusive minutes that apply to your provider and call package.

Calls to 084 provided by BT will be charged at 5 pence per minute. A call set-up fee of 3 pence per call applies to calls from BT residential lines. Mobile and other providers' charges may vary.



## Medicines which you CAN take whilst breastfeeding

- Painkillers e.g. paracetamol and ibuprofen
  - Antibiotics e.g. penicillin
  - Hayfever medicines e.g. Clarityn, Zirtek
  - Cough medicines which don't make you sleepy
  - Asthma inhalers
  - Vitamins at normal doses
  - Medication to help with symptoms of depression.
- Please contact the Drugs in Breastmilk Helpline if you need further information.

## MEDICINES WHICH YOU SHOULD NOT TAKE WHILST BREASTFEEDING

- Aspirin
- Cold remedies e.g. Sudafed, without more information
- Sleeping tablets, without more information
- Codeine, without further advice/information

**Do not take any medicines (including over the counter remedies) without checking with your doctor, pharmacist or BfN Drugs in Breastmilk Helpline.**

**Drugs in Breastmilk Helpline: 0844 412 4665**

Ask your GP or pharmacist to phone the Drugs in Breastmilk Helpline if they need more information. They can also check the British National Formulary for Children. If a drug is licensed to be given to babies and children then it is likely to be safe to be taken by a mother who is breastfeeding. (See NICE Maternal and Child Nutrition recommendation 15).