Breastfeeding and Substance Use: A Parent Resource

Choosing whether or not to breastfeed is a personal decision. No matter your history, your breastfeeding choices, or where you are in your recovery, you deserve simple, accurate information to help you decide. You are the most important part of your care team. Your thoughts, feelings, and needs matter, and it's okay to have questions or mixed feelings about breastfeeding or pumping.

If you choose to feed your baby your breastmilk, your care team will support you in doing so as safely as possible. Talking about substance use can feel hard, but being honest helps your team support both you and your baby and make the best decisions together. **It's important for you to be an active part of the discussion and decision-making about your baby's nutrition and feeding.**

Feeding Guidelines

Past or current substance use does not automatically mean that you can't provide milk for your baby. It means you and your care team will work together to support safety, health, and your feeding goals. Below are the guidelines for breastfeeding and substance use.

There are many benefits to both parent and baby when you feed your baby breastmilk, now and in the future.

When it is usually safe to feed your baby breastmilk:

- If non-prescribed substance use stops at least one week before the baby is born.
- If you are in treatment under the care of a substance use provider and are taking medications as prescribed for substance use.

Only small amounts of prescribed medications for opioid use disorder pass into breastmilk and are safe, even if your dose is increased. For babies whose birth parent was in treatment during pregnancy and experienced temporary symptoms like fussiness or shaking, breastfeeding can help them get better faster.

When it is NOT safe to feed your baby breastmilk:

- If you are using a non-prescribed substance and/or have returned to use and are not in treatment for substance use. You may need to stop giving your baby your breastmilk for a short time. Different substances, including alcohol and cannabis, affect breastmilk and your baby differently.
- If you are not sure if a medication is safe to use when feeding your baby your milk, consult your care team.

A return to use does not mean you must stop feeding your baby your breastmilk forever. You may need to pump and throw away your milk until it's safe to feed again, even if you only used a substance once. Your care team will tell you how long you need to wait

based on research. Keep expressing milk to build and maintain your milk production until it is safe to feed. Your future milk supply will depend on how often and how fully you express your milk in the first days and weeks after your baby is born.

If you're already in treatment, it's important to stay connected to your treatment team.

Even if it is not safe to give your breastmilk to your baby right away, there are things you can do to help your body continue to make milk until it is safe to feed:

- Hold and snuggle your baby, skin to skin (their bare chest against your bare chest).
- Express and collect your milk. A nurse and/or breastfeeding specialist can teach you how to do this with your hands and/or breast pump.
- Continue to collect your milk and throw it away until it is safe to give it to your baby. Talk with your care team about that timing.

Support

No matter what feeding path you choose, you deserve compassion, accurate information, and care that respects your experience. You don't have to figure this out alone. If you have any questions, support is available.

- To get a **breast pump**:
  - If you are a MaineCare member, ask your provider to prescribe one for you. MaineCare will cover the cost.
  - Contact Maine **WIC**. They can also provide support with breastfeeding.
- To learn more about **MaineMOM,** a MaineCare program providing team-based care for pregnant and postpartum individuals with opioid use disorder, visit MaineMOM.org.
- To find **substance use treatment support**, including a MaineMOM provider, visit Treatment Connection Maine.
- To learn more about **CradleME**, a free service that connects you to a nurse, family visitor, or program specialist to find services and resources, visit CradleME.org.
- To find breastfeeding resources, visit the **Maine State Breastfeeding Coalition's** webpage.
- To find fact sheets and resources on pregnancy and breastfeeding exposures, visit the **MotherToBaby** webpage.

For more information, questions, or concerns, please contact:

- MaineMOM at MaineMOM@maine.gov or call MaineCare Member Services at 1-800-977-6740
- Maine State Breastfeeding Coalition at info@mainebreastfeeds.org

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