



*NSW Medications in Pregnancy & Breastfeeding Service*



## **Caffeine and Pregnancy**

Information in this leaflet is general in nature and should not take the place of advice from your health care provider. With every pregnancy there is a 3 to 5% risk of having a baby with a birth defect.

### **What is caffeine?**

Caffeine is a widely consumed, naturally occurring substance derived from the leaves, seeds and fruits of a range of plants. It is found in varying amounts in coffee, tea, chocolate drinks, cola drinks, energy drinks, guarana and chocolate. It is also found in some prescription and over-the-counter medications.<sup>1</sup> This can include medications for colds, pain relief, travel sickness, migraines and medications for increasing alertness. It can also be an ingredient of some herbal preparations, appetite suppressants and weight loss products. Caffeine is well known to have a stimulant effect- small amounts can increase alertness but larger quantities are associated with anxiety, restlessness and sleeping difficulties.

### **Issues for pregnancy**

Due to current limitations in scientific research, it is difficult to determine whether a mother's caffeine intake in pregnancy is associated with problems for the baby during and after pregnancy. What is known, is that caffeine does pass from mother to baby across the placenta during pregnancy as well as into breastmilk after birth. Unborn babies are less able to break down caffeine than adults. This means that babies may be exposed to the same stimulant effect as their mother.

Overall current data suggests that low to moderate caffeine intake does not make it harder to conceive a baby, nor is there evidence that it causes miscarriage.<sup>1</sup> At this level of intake, there is no association between caffeine and birth defects and no evidence for long term effects on children in terms of behaviour and development.<sup>1</sup>

Currently, the risks associated with higher levels of caffeine intake (greater than 300mg per day) are uncertain.<sup>1</sup>

### **Recommendations for pregnancy**

In view of current knowledge, small amounts of caffeine are considered safe in pregnancy. The recommended limit in Australia is a maximum of 200mg caffeine per day. This would be equivalent to 1-2 cups of espresso style coffee, 3 cups of instant coffee, 4 cups of medium strength tea, 4 cups of cocoa or hot chocolate or 4 cans of cola.<sup>2</sup> These amounts are estimates because the amount of caffeine in coffee particularly, varies widely. It is preferable to avoid double shots of espresso coffee and drinks which are marketed as sports and energy drinks as they have high levels of caffeine. If you choose to drink highly caffeinated drinks such as these, you should limit yourself to one drink a day and have no other caffeine intake that day.

*For more information call MotherSafe: NSW Medications in Pregnancy and Breastfeeding Service  
on 9382 6539 (Sydney Metropolitan Area) or 1800 647 848 (Non-Metropolitan Area) Monday -Friday 9am-5pm  
(excluding public holidays)*



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Women have increased water requirements during pregnancy. It is recommended during pregnancy to drink water or milk in preference to consuming caffeinated beverages.

If you take medication that contains caffeine, whether it is prescription or over-the-counter, you should take this into account when considering your total caffeine intake and the recommended limits. If you are considering taking a herbal remedy that contains caffeine, you should consult with your health care provider or contact MotherSafe before taking.

### **Breastfeeding**

Caffeine readily passes into breast milk. Newborn babies until about 4 months of age are less able to breakdown caffeine and it accumulates in their bloodstream. This may make a baby unsettled and irritable. As a result, it is preferable to limit your caffeine intake and consume other fluids in preference such as water and milk, particularly in your baby's first few months of life.<sup>3</sup> Smoking cigarettes adds to the effects of caffeine on a breastfed baby. If you smoke, it is advisable to even further limit your intake of food and drinks containing caffeine.<sup>4</sup>

### **References**

1. Morgan S, Koren G, Bozzo P. Is caffeine consumption safe during pregnancy? *Canadian Family Physician*. April 2013; 59 (4):361-362
2. NSW Food Authority. Pregnancy and food safety. Available from <http://www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/foodsafetyandyou/life-events-and-food/pregnancy/pregnancy-and-food-safety> accessed August 2019.
3. Queensland Health. Healthy eating for breastfeeding mothers. Available from [https://www.health.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0014/152132/antenatal-brstfd.pdf](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0014/152132/antenatal-brstfd.pdf) Accessed August 2019
4. Australian Government, NHMRC. Eat for Health. Infant feeding guidelines, information for health workers 2012. Available from [https://www.eatforhealth.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/the\\_guidelines/n56\\_infant\\_feeding\\_guidelines.pdf](https://www.eatforhealth.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/the_guidelines/n56_infant_feeding_guidelines.pdf) Accessed August 2019

### **Additional information**

MotherToBaby Fact sheet. Caffeine. December 2017. Available from <https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/caffeine-pregnancy/> Accessed August 2019

Your Room: Energy drinks and caffeine. Available from <https://yourroom.health.nsw.gov.au/a-z-of-drugs/Pages/energy-drinks-and-caffeine.aspx> Accessed August 2019

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