

# Prescription Drug Misuse Among Pregnant Women



*The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) defines prescription drug abuse (PDA) as the use of prescription pain relievers, tranquilizers, stimulants, or sedatives without a prescription for perceived medical need or for the experience or feeling the drug causes.<sup>1</sup>*



Prescription drug misuse is use of prescription drugs (pain relievers, tranquilizers, stimulants, sedatives, etc.) without a prescription, at different frequency or dosages than prescribed, or mixed with other drugs without medical approval. Misuse of prescription drugs during pregnancy is especially dangerous. It can:

- harm the developing fetus,
- cause physical and mental health problems for the pregnant woman,
- cause family and financial problems,
- affect job performance, and
- increase the risk of on-the-job injuries.

## ***Signs of Prescription Drug Misuse***

- Consuming larger doses of medications than prescribed.
- Consuming medications more frequently than prescribed.
- Frequent “loss” of medications and making appointments to get more.
- Going to more than one provider to get medications.
- Getting medications from family, friends, and other people either by asking or stealing.



## ■ ***Type of Drug Taken & Potential Harms to the Mother and Fetus***

- Opiates, prescribed for pain relief, can cause slowed breathing, nausea, and drowsiness in the mother. They can cause preterm birth, low birthweight, or fetal death. They can cause birth defects including brain/spinal cord abnormalities, heart defects, and glaucoma.
- Tranquilizers, prescribed to calm anxiety, can cause slowed breathing and heartbeat, drowsiness, dizziness, and depression in the mother and may cause increased risk of fetal death and birth defects.
- Stimulants, prescribed to increase alertness or treat hyperactivity, can increase body temperature, and can cause seizures, fast or irregular heartbeat, high or irregular blood pressure, sleep problems, tremors, and panic attacks in the mother. They can cause preterm birth or fetal death and can increase blood pressure, risk of brain/heart defects, and risk of a baby born with cleft lip/palate.

## ■ ***Prescription Drug Misuse in Pregnancy Can Negatively Affect Family Members***

**Prescription drug misuse can:**

- strain the mother’s relationship with her partner and other family members,
- cause financial problems, and
- negatively affect mother-infant attachment if the mother spends time away from her infant due to extended hospitalization or drug treatment.

## ■ *Recommendations for Women Who Are Pregnant or Considering Becoming Pregnant*

- Learn the signs of prescription drug misuse.
- If you are unsure about your prescription drug use, discuss it with a health care provider.
- Do not stop taking any prescribed medications without a doctor's advice.

## ■ *Recommendations for Those Concerned about a Friend or Family Member Who Is Pregnant or Thinking of Becoming Pregnant*

- Go along with her to her medical appointments.
- Encourage her to tell the health care provider what medications she is taking, including those not prescribed for her.
- Help her connect with professionals who can offer advice and treatment.

## ■ *Resources Regarding Prescription Drug Misuse*

- **Narcotics Anonymous:** <https://www.na.org/>
- **MotherToBaby:** <http://www.mothersbaby.org/>
- **SAMHSA's National Helpline:** 1-800-662-HELP (4357)

