

Opioids and Lactation



It's safe to nurse your baby if you're taking prescribed opioids for a short period of time, like after surgery.

It's not safe to nurse your baby while you take opioids with other downers like benzodiazepines or alcohol.

It's not safe to nurse your baby while you're taking opioids that aren't from a pharmacy.

It's recommended to nurse your baby if you're taking prescribed medications for opioid use disorder, like methadone or buprenorphine.

What are opioids?

Opioids like fentanyl, heroin, Percocet®/Oxycontin® (oxycodone), codeine, and Vicodin® (hydrocodone) are "downers." They slow down your breathing, heart rate, and the messages between your brain and body. Taking opioids with other downers like benzodiazepines or alcohol could cause you to have an accidental overdose.

Naloxone (Narcan®) is a medication that reverses opioid overdose. It moves opioids off the receptors in your body for about 30-90 minutes. **Naloxone can save your life if you have an opioid overdose** and you should always keep some with you.

Can opioids enter human milk?

Yes. If you take opioids, your milk will have opioids in it. The amount that is in your milk depends on how much you take, which opioid you take and the amount of time that has passed since taking it. Opioids levels are at their highest in your milk 1-3 hours after taking them.

If you take naloxone (Narcan®) it will not remove opioids from your milk.

About prescribed opioid use

- Talk to your healthcare provider about which opioid you're taking and the amount you're taking when deciding if chest/breastfeeding is right for you and your baby.
- You don't need to pump and discard your milk after you receive fentanyl in a hospital, like during a c-section or for getting your tubes tied.

If you occasionally take opioids that aren't prescribed or you use them again after stopping

Before taking opioids:

- Plan for feeding your baby. Pump and store your milk, buy infant formula, or buy donor milk.

While taking opioids:

- Don't smoke opioids near your baby, where your baby lives, or in closed spaces like cars.

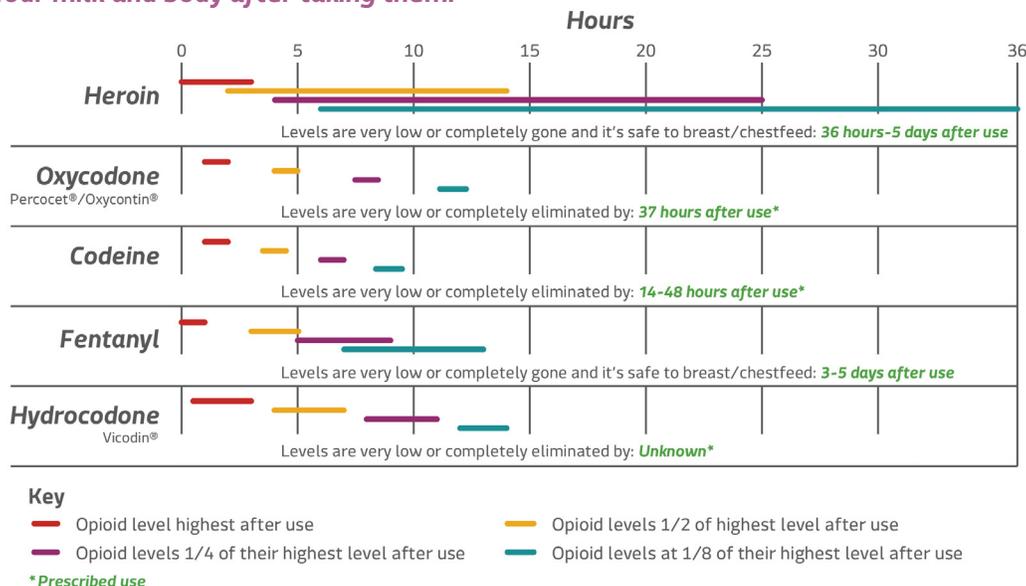
After taking opioids:

- You can feed your baby infant formula, donor milk or milk you pumped before taking opioids.
- Pump and discard your milk for at least 1-3 hours.
- Pumping as often as you usually feed your baby is a good way to maintain your milk supply.

How long should you pump and discard your milk before chest/breastfeeding again?

- Wait at least 1-3 hours after taking opioids before nursing your baby. After 3 hours, the amount of opioids in your milk will continue to get smaller. It will usually take 1-5 days for your body to completely remove all opioids from your milk.
- If you feel drowsy from opioids, pump and discard your milk until you feel alert.
- Heroin: Pump and discard for at least 36 hours after using heroin. Heroin can stay in your milk for up to 5 days after use.
- Fentanyl: We don't know exactly how long it takes for fentanyl to be completely gone from human milk. If you've used fentanyl that isn't from a pharmacy for a long period of time, pump and discard for 3-5 days before nursing your baby.

Opioid levels in your milk and body after taking them:



Harmful effects on your baby are more likely with higher doses and the longer you take them.

May cause harmful effects if you take

More than 100 mg* codeine per day, or any dose for more than 4 days

More than 28 mg* oxycodone per day

More than 80 mg hydrocodone per day

Probably safe to nurse if you take

70 mg* or less codeine per day taken for 4 or fewer days

10.5 mg* or less oxycodone per day

25 mg or less hydrocodone per day

*Based on a 154 lb (70 kg) body weight.

Keeping you and your baby healthy and safe

- Take a multivitamin with iodine and eat brightly colored fruits and vegetables to increase the nutrition in your milk.
- Talk to your baby's healthcare provider if your baby is more sleepy than usual, has difficulty eating or is constipated.
- Get a babysitter for the time you are intoxicated.
- Don't drive while you're under the influence of opioids.
- Avoid sleeping with your baby after taking opioids. You are at a higher risk of accidentally suffocating your baby. The safest sleep arrangement is to share the same room with your baby in their own crib.
- Protect yourself and your baby from secondhand smoke. Ask other people not to smoke opioids in your home and don't take your baby to places where there is smoke.
- You can reduce the negative effects on your baby by taking lower amounts of opioids, taking opioids less often, and waiting until your milk doesn't have opioids in it to nurse your baby.
- Store opioids and substances securely. This is especially important if toddlers or other children are in the house.
 - **If you think your baby has swallowed opioids**, call Poison Control at 800-222-1222.
 - **Call 911** if your baby has slow breathing, stops breathing, is difficult to wake, has skin or lips that look blue, is lethargic, too sleepy, or has vomiting and/or diarrhea that won't stop.





How opioids may affect an infant

Opioids can make infants sleepy, difficult to wake up, have difficulty eating, be less alert and interactive. About 17-23% of infants fed human milk with opioids in it will have some of these symptoms. Your baby's chance of having these symptoms are higher if you nurse while feeling drowsy after taking opioids. It isn't safe to nurse your baby if you are taking more than one opioid, high doses of opioids or are taking opioids with alcohol, benzodiazepines or another downer.

Some infants have withdrawal symptoms if their chest/breastfeeding parent stops taking opioids or stops nursing them. Symptoms to watch for are irritability, restlessness and crying more than usual. Seek medical care if your baby isn't eating, sleeping or consolable. If you take opioids, try to reduce how often your baby nurses before weaning them completely.

If I take opioids while I'm pregnant, will my baby have withdrawal symptoms after they're born?

If you take opioids while you're pregnant, your baby might have withdrawal symptoms after they're born. Your baby will also need to stay in the hospital for a few extra days.

When you give birth, the best type of care for you and your baby is called Eat, Sleep and Console. This care includes:

- You and your baby staying in the same room together.
- Keeping the room quiet with the light dim.
- Swaddling and holding your baby.
- Nursing your baby or holding them skin-to-skin while they bottle feed.

Not all hospitals offer Eat, Sleep and Console. To find out if the hospital you're planning to deliver at offers Eat, Sleep and Console you can:

- Ask your prenatal care provider if the hospital you want to deliver at offers Eat, Sleep and Console.
- You can call the hospital's main phone number and ask the operator for the maternity department (this is sometimes called the 'postpartum', 'antepartum' or 'mother baby' floors/units). Any of the nurses working should know if they offer Eat, Sleep and Console.
- If you can, choose to deliver at a hospital that offers Eat, Sleep and Console. That is the best type of care for you and your baby.



Reducing your opioid use

It is difficult to stop using opioids if you've taken them for a long time. There are [medications for opioid use disorder](#) that you can take, that will help reduce your cravings and withdrawal symptoms. The most effective medications are methadone and buprenorphine, and they're safe to take while nursing your baby. Talk to your health care provider or call the [Washington Recovery Help Line](#) at 866-789-1511 for support or information about how to get medications for opioid use disorder.

People use different terms to describe their body parts. Some transgender and non-binary birth parents use "chest" instead of "breasts." In this document, we use breastfeeding and chestfeeding as interchangeable terms. Lactation is a biological process where your body makes milk to feed babies.