

## MEDICATIONS FOR OPIOID USE DISORDER (MOUD) DURING PREGNANCY

Treatment for opioid use disorders in pregnant women and new mothers often includes medications like methadone and buprenorphine. Methadone has been utilized for over 40 years, while buprenorphine is newer. Both medications greatly improve outcomes for infants and help stabilize pregnant women as they receive counseling and healthcare services.

Both drugs are safer than street drugs, which are sometimes cut with low-quality ingredients such as sugar or caffeine. MOUD also eliminates the risk of HIV due to shared needles.

Research indicates that mothers in Opioid Treatment Programs (OTP) – including those with severe addiction – remain in treatment longer. Evidence also shows that unborn babies exposed to buprenorphine display fewer withdrawal symptoms at birth than babies exposed to other opioids, such as heroin or Fentanyl.

## NO COLD TURKEY FOR PREGNANT WOMEN: MOUD IS THE GOLD STANDARD

It may seem like a good idea for pregnant women to stop using opioids cold turkey. But this is, without question, a bad idea. Stopping all at once may present serious problems for mother *and* child. Attempting a self-taper – gradually reducing the amount of drug without medical supervision – is associated with high rates of relapse.

Research shows that Medications for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD) is the safest and most effective treatment for pregnant women with opioid use disorder. It's important for these women to seek specialized treatment centers that offer MOUD programs, which help stabilize their addiction and promote a healthy environment for their children.



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## OPIOID ADDICTION DURING PREGNANCY

The opioid crisis has been building in the U.S. for twenty years. Although federal, state, and local lawmakers are taking steps to combat the rising epidemic of opioid addiction and overdose deaths, it shows no sign of letting up. According to data provided by the Center for Disease Control (CDC), more than 150 people die from opioid overdoses every single day.

The effect on children and families, including pregnant women, is staggering. A report from The Center for Disease Control (CDC) shows that over 50,000 pregnant women each year in the U.S. struggle with Opioid Use Disorder (OUD), resulting in a long list of devastating consequences.

The good news is that treatment can significantly reduce the risk opioid use disorders pose to mother and child. With high-quality treatment and compassionate care, many new mothers are able to deliver healthy babies. And they can stay clean after giving birth.



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## Opioid Addiction DURING PREGNANCY

MEDICATIONS FOR OPIOID USE DISORDER (MOUD)

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## WHAT ARE OPIOIDS?

**Prescription opioid drugs** are strong painkillers that a doctor prescribes for chronic pain or pain after an injury or surgery. Commonly prescribed opioids include hydrocodone (Vicodin), oxycodone (OxyContin), tramadol, morphine or codeine.

Prescription painkillers are safe when used as directed, but misuse can lead to serious issues. Problems arise from using these drugs improperly or seeking a high, often leading to illegal purchases or theft from friends and family.

**Heroin** is an illegal, highly addictive opioid with a high risk of fatal overdose. It's especially dangerous when mixed with alcohol or other drugs.

**Fentanyl** is an extremely powerful opioid prescribed for severe pain, such as in advanced cancer cases. It is 50 to 100 times stronger than morphine and carries a very high risk of overdose.

Most overdose deaths are caused by drugs from black-market labs. Fentanyl is often mixed with cocaine or heroin, leaving buyers unaware of the drugs' potency or contents.

## RISKS OF OPIOID USE DURING PREGNANCY

Using drugs during pregnancy is like playing Russian roulette: you can't predict how opioids will affect a developing baby. Effects can range from minor to severe, depending on factors like genetics, frequency, amount, and duration of opioid use.



The unborn child can be harmed when opioids cross the placenta, regardless of whether the drugs are prescribed or illegally obtained. Potential risks to the developing baby include:

- Fetal convulsions
- Birth defects
- Malnutrition
- Low birth weight
- Stunted growth
- Increased risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)
- Respiratory problems
- Withdrawal symptoms such as diarrhea, tremors, fever, difficulty feeding, irritability or seizures.

Pregnant women using opioids face increased risks of miscarriage and potential overdose after childbirth if use continues, especially if they struggle with postpartum depression or the stresses of new motherhood.

## WHY MANY WOMEN DON'T SEEK TREATMENT: STIGMA AND STEREOTYPES

Pregnant women with opioid use disorder should seek help as soon as possible to minimize risks to both mother and child.

The issue, however, is that many pregnant women with substance use disorders receive inadequate treatment from medical professionals, often facing discrimination and stigma.

As a result, many hesitate to seek treatment when needed due to guilt, shame, and fear of losing custody of their child.

Eighteen states label drug use by pregnant women as child abuse, while three allow involuntary hospitalization, discouraging women from seeking help. Only four states have laws protecting pregnant women from such discrimination.

## SPECIALIZED TREATMENT FOR PREGNANT WOMEN

Punishment is ineffective for helping pregnant women with chronic opioid use. Most are aware of the risks, and most want to stop. Expecting mothers require safe, confidential, and compassionate care, which can be difficult to access.

Specialized treatment can help women address issues like depression, anxiety, or PTSD caused by emotional, physical, or sexual abuse in childhood or adulthood.

Support should be accessible for financial, legal, or relationship issues, and mothers should have the opportunity to learn healthier stress-coping methods.

Pregnant women or new mothers using opioids for chronic pain should be advised on alternative pain management options like exercise, physical therapy, or acupuncture.

If you or someone you know needs comprehensive opioid use disorder treatment for expecting or new mothers, please don't hesitate to reach out. You can create a lifetime of change:

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