



Cocaine use during pregnancy



We're here to support you to have a healthy pregnancy and a safe start for your family. This leaflet will give you information about the risks of using cocaine while you are pregnant and where you can get help to quit.

Keeping you and your baby safe

It's safest to avoid cocaine:

- When trying to get pregnant.
- During pregnancy.
- While breastfeeding.
- While caring for your children.

Risks for You

In pregnancy, cocaine can:

- Increase the chance of blood clots.
- Increase the chance of miscarriage.
- Increase the chance of stillbirth.
- Cause placental abruption (placenta separating from the womb), which can be life threatening.

Cocaine is often mixed with other substances, which can increase the risk of overdose, so it's important to be cautious and avoid using alone. We also recommend keeping a supply of naloxone and ensuring people around you know how to use it in an emergency.

Risks for Your Baby

- Cocaine crosses the placenta and can affect your baby's brain, face, eyes, heart, limbs, intestines, genitals and urinary tract.
- Stays in the baby's system for a long time.
- Higher chance of low birth weight, being shorter, and having a smaller head.
- Higher chance of premature birth (before 37 weeks).
- Higher chance of birth defects and damage to the developing brain and nervous system.

After Birth

Babies exposed to cocaine late in pregnancy, after birth may show:

- Irritability.
- Tremors or shaking.
- Muscle stiffness.
- Poor feeding.
- Sleeping difficulties.
- Hyperactivity.
- Sometimes vomiting, diarrhoea, or seizures.

Symptoms usually begin 1–2 days after birth and can last for weeks. We usually recommend that you stay in hospital for up to 5 days after the birth.

If your baby shows these symptoms, there are gentle ways you can help them feel more settled. The **Eat, Sleep, Console** approach focuses on comforting your baby through close contact, skin to skin cuddles, quiet environments, and keeping lights and noise low.

Feeding little and often and holding or swaddling your baby may soothe tremors or irritability. If your baby is struggling to eat well, sleep between feeds, or be comforted, the healthcare team will work closely with you to support both you and your baby.

Long term problems for your baby may include

- Attention and self control difficulties
- Learning delays
- Problems with emotions and behaviour
- Language delays
- Need for extra support in school

Breastfeeding

- It's not safe to breastfeed while using cocaine. Babies cannot break it down, and it stays in their system for a long time.
- If cocaine is used, express and discard breast milk for 72 hours (3 days) before breastfeeding again.

Where can you get help?

It's important to be honest with your midwife and other healthcare professionals about using cocaine during pregnancy. We understand that making changes can be hard, but we're here to help and support you to have the healthiest and safest pregnancy possible.

Speak to your midwife or find further information here:

- **WithYou - Highland Hub**
[WithYou - Highland Hub webpage](#)
- **Cocaine Anonymous Scotland**
[Cocaine Anonymous Scotland website](#)
- **Drug use and pregnancy**
[NHS Highland - Drug Use and Pregnancy page](#)
- **Highland Alcohol & Drug Advice & Support Service**
Includes further information about naloxone supply.
01463 717 594
- **Highland Alcohol and Drugs Partnership (HADP)**
[HADP - Adult services page](#)
- **Youth Action Team**
For young people under 18, or under 25 if care-experienced.
01463 256 603
- **Know The Score**
0800 587 5879 or [Know the Score website](#)
- **Crew**
0131 220 3404 or [Crew website](#)
- **Highland Substance Awareness Toolkit**
[Highland Substance Awareness Toolkit website](#)
- **Highland Overdose Prevention and Engagement (HOPE) app**
Search 'Highland Overdose' on Apple App Store / Google Play.