

Getting Help for Substance Use During Pregnancy

Substance Use

Substances - like alcohol and drugs - change the way our brain works. One of the first changes that happens is that substances take over the part of our brain that controls our cravings. Soon people find themselves taking substances more often and in larger amounts.

When someone's substance use causes them to have health issues or problems at work, school, or home, they may have a substance use disorder.

Fortunately, pregnant people - like anyone else - can and do recover from substance use disorder. They can also have a happy, healthy baby.



Steps Toward Recovery and Having a Healthy Baby

1 Step 1: Make an Appointment at Your Clinic

A supportive doctor, nurse, or other healthcare provider can help you decide what treatments are best for you.

Depending on what substances you use, taking certain medications can decrease your cravings, stop withdrawal symptoms, and help you heal. Also, getting care early reduces you and your baby's risks for most complications.

2 Step 2: Connect with Your Culture

The opposite of addiction is connection. Our cultural teachings have helped us understand how to live well for generations. Participating in traditional practices and ceremonies can be healing for pregnant people and their families.

3 Step 3: Talk it Out

Talking with a counselor can help you change behaviors related to substance use. It can also help if you are experiencing any conditions - like anxiety or depression. These conditions are common during pregnancy and the first year after your baby is born. Also, let friends and family know what you are going through. Having a strong support system can help you on your journey.

4 Step 4: Support Your Body

Take good care of your body by eating healthy, getting enough sleep, exercising, and taking recommended prenatal vitamins. All of these things can help you have a healthy pregnancy.

Your Rights

Pregnant people who use substances have the right to be treated with dignity and respect.

It is important that those helping you:

- **Use kind and respectful language**

It is unkind to call someone an “addict” or “junkie.” These words label a person based on only one activity they do in life. You are a whole person with many different interests, hobbies, and gifts. If people on your team use words that make you feel uncomfortable, ask them to stop. If they do not, see another person.

Kind and respectful language includes using what is called person-first language. For example, saying “people who use drugs,” instead of saying “drug users.”



- **Are non-judgmental**

Substance use disorder is a health issue that impacts many people. It can happen to anyone. Seek out people who are non-judgmental and support you based on what you and your family need.

- **Respect your decisions**

Some people are not ready to stop taking substances completely. If this is the case for you, work with individuals that can help you develop strategies to protect your safety and reduce your baby's risk while you continue to take substances.

Developing a Support System

To prepare for birth and parenthood, we need support from a wide variety of people who can help build up our self-esteem and hope for the future. People that can provide support include:

- Healthcare providers
- Counselors
- Social Workers
- Cultural Supports
- Spiritual Supports
- Supportive Family and Friends
- Elders
- Peer Recovery Specialists, Mentors
- Recovery Groups

Be Kind to Yourself

You have many positive qualities and deserve to be your best self. Remember that it's ok to struggle as you work toward making a better life for you, your family, and your baby. We are all in the process of learning different life skills to be happier and healthier. Judgment and unkindness – even when it's from ourselves – only stands in the way. As your journey continues, so will your understanding of how to care for yourself and your family.



Visit the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board's website at indiancountryecho.org/family-care-plans-toolkit to learn more about substance use, getting help, and other important topics.