For more information regarding OTIS or a Teratology Information Service in your area, call OTIS Information at (866) 626-6847 or visit us online at: www.OTISpregnancy.org.

Caffeine and Pregnancy

The information below will help you determine if the use of caffeine represents an increased fetal risk. With every pregnancy, all women have a 3 to 5 percent chance to have a baby with a birth defect.

What is caffeine?

Caffeine is a stimulant found in many foods and beverages. It is also found in prescription and over the counter medications. Caffeine is a naturally occurring substance found in the leaves, seeds, and fruits of more than 60 plants.

How much caffeine is in common foods and drinks?

A few examples of caffeinated items include: 8oz. cup of coffee (65-120mg of caffeine), brewed tea (20-90mg), 12oz. Coke (45mg), 1 cup of Haagen-Dazs coffee ice cream (58mg), Hershey chocolate bar (10mg), 8oz. hot chocolate (5mg), and 2 tablets of Excedrin (130mg). Some herbals such as guarana also contain caffeine.

What exactly does caffeine do to my body?

Caffeine's main effect is increased alertness. Within 1 hour of coffee consumption, caffeine usually reaches its peak level in the bloodstream and remains there for 4-6 hours. Caffeine also stimulates secretion of acid in the stomach, sometimes resulting in an upset stomach. Caffeine is also a diuretic, which means it helps eliminate fluids from the body and can result in water and calcium loss.

I am trying to become pregnant. Is it true that drinking caffeinated beverages will lower my chance to become pregnant?

Results from studies have been mixed. Some studies have suggested that high levels of caffeine (>300mg/day) may make it harder to conceive, but these findings are not proven.

Low to moderate caffeine consumption (<300mg/day) does not seem to reduce a woman's chance of becoming pregnant.

I am pregnant. Is it safe for me to continue drinking coffee and soda?

Most experts agree that moderation and common sense are the keys for consuming caffeinated items during pregnancy. "Moderate" caffeine consumption is approximately 300mg/day, which is similar to 3 cups of coffee.

It is also important for pregnant women to drink sufficient quantities of water, milk and juice. These fluids should not be replaced with caffeinated beverages.

Does caffeine cause or contribute to miscarriage?

Researchers have had difficulty determining whether there is a relationship between caffeine and miscarriage since miscarriage is very common. Recent reports suggest that low to moderate consumption of caffeine does not increase the risk for miscarriage.

A few studies have shown that there may be an increased risk for miscarriage with high caffeine consumption (>300 mg/day), particularly in combination with smoking or alcohol, or with very high levels of caffeine consumption (>800 mg/day).

Will drinking caffeinated beverages during my pregnancy cause birth defects in my baby?

No. In humans, even large amounts of caffeine have not been shown to cause an increased chance for birth defects.

I drink 5-6 cups of coffee a day and I am 7 months pregnant. Will this higher amount affect my baby?

Caffeine does cross the placenta; therefore higher amounts of caffeine could affect babies in the same way as it does adults. Some reports have stated that children born to mothers who consumed >500mg/day were more likely to have faster heart rates, tremors, increased breathing rate, and spend more time awake in the days following birth.

Is it a problem if my baby's father consumed a lot of caffeine when I became pregnant?

Very little information is available on the effects of caffeine on sperm. One report stated that caffeine seems to increase the motility (movement) of sperm. Currently there are no other known effects on pregnancy.

Can I drink caffeinated beverages while I breast feed?

Caffeine is excreted in breast milk, but there is very little information on how it might affect the baby. When breastfeeding, caffeine consumption should be limited. Women should remain well hydrated with water, juice and milk while breastfeeding.

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