



## **Counseling Women about Polysubstance Use**

Optimal pregnancy outcomes for women with opioid use disorders are associated with **treatment** with methadone or buprenorphine and **abstinence** from other substances, including tobacco, alcohol, marijuana, and other substances of abuse. However, recognizing that complete abstinence is sometimes not attainable, a harm reductive approach based on maximizing information and support for the pregnant woman is essential.

### ***Pregnancy risks associated with polysubstance use***

- Placental insufficiency
- Preterm labor
- Miscarriage
- Stillbirth

### ***Neonatal impacts***

- Premature birth
- Low birthweight
- Reduced head circumference
- Birth defects (alcohol, benzodiazepines)
- Perinatal infection, including Hepatitis B, C, and HIV
- Increased duration and severity of Neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS/NOWS)

### ***Child development***

- Delayed growth
- Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)
- Learning and behavior problems

In contrast to OUD, evidence-based treatment for other substance use disorders during pregnancy consists primarily of behavioral interventions, especially cognitive behavioral therapy. Heavy use of some substances, specifically alcohol or benzodiazepines, can result in physiologic dependence requiring

medically managed detoxification (alcohol) or tapering (benzodiazepines). *Factsheet 6* of SAMHSA's *Clinical Guidance for the Treatment of Pregnant and Parenting Women with Opioid Use Disorder and their Infants* includes a summary table describing recommended treatment approaches for perinatal substance use disorders other than OUD (SAMHSA, 2018, p. 48). An individualized plan of care is essential taking into account each patients' drug/alcohol use history, the presence of medical and co-occurring mental health conditions, social needs, family responsibilities, and preferences.

### ***Substance-specific resources for providers***

- <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/substance-use-in-women/substance-use-while-pregnant-breastfeeding>

### ***Substance-specific patient education materials***

- Cocaine:  
<http://www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/cocaine.aspx>
- Amphetamines and club drugs:  
<http://www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/ecstasy-methamphetamine-and-other-amphetamines.aspx>
- Marijuana:  
<http://www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/marijuana.aspx>
- Prescription opioid abuse:  
<http://www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/prescription-opioids-during-pregnancy.aspx>
- Tobacco:  
<http://www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/smoking-during-pregnancy.aspx>
- Alcohol:  
<http://www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/alcohol-during-pregnancy.aspx>