

All correspondence to:

The Breastfeeding Network
PO Box 11126, Paisley PA2 8YB
Admin Tel: 0844 412 0995
e-mail: admin@breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk
www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk

The safety of drugs passing to the baby through breastmilk – a summary

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- **Most drugs pass into breastmilk** – but generally in very small amounts (less than 1%).
- **It is safe to continue breastfeeding when taking most medications.** If insufficient information on any one drug is available, it may be possible to use a different one on which there is more information available instead.
- **It can be difficult to find information** on how much of a drug gets into breastmilk from commonly available medical texts.
- **The age of the baby can be important** when deciding if it is safe for a breastfeeding mother to take a medicine. A premature baby may not be able to deal with exposure to drugs which would be safer if given to a baby born at term. An older baby is likely to have efficient systems to detoxify any drug which reached it through its mother's breastmilk.
- **The value of continued breastfeeding is generally more important** than the need for a particular drug. There are exceptions such as treatment of maternal cancer.
- **It is possible to measure very small amounts of drugs** in breastmilk, it does not mean that they will be harmful to the baby
- **Alternative drugs may be available** which are safe to take during breastfeeding. The mother may decide she would rather not take medication.
- **If a drug is available in a formulation for children** it is likely to be safe to be taken by a breastfeeding woman.
- **Many drugs are unlicensed for use during lactation.** This means that the manufacturers have not undertaken research to confirm safety on ethical grounds. Data may be available on the amount which gets into breastmilk. However the person recommending the drug e.g. GP has to take ultimate responsibility for prescribing should there be any adverse effects in the baby.

To find your nearest Breastfeeding Supporter call the Supporterline 0300 100 0210

Calls to 0300 numbers cost no more than calls to UK numbers starting 01 and 02 and will be part of any inclusive minutes that apply to your provider and call package

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