

Herbal Teas during Pregnancy and Breastfeeding

Pregnant or breastfeeding women often switch from coffee to tea or herbal tea in order to cut back on their intake of caffeine. Keep in mind, however, that you should use caution when drinking herbal teas. If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, consult with your health care provider before drinking *any* herbal teas (or using *any* herbal products).



Can Herbs and Herbal Products be Harmful?

YES! Some herbs contain very strong, medicinal-like ingredients. A few can be poisonous and life-threatening. For example, *Ma Huang*, also known as *ephedrine*, which is claimed to be a weight-reducing aid, can cause death.

Caution should be taken when considering the use of herbal products. Some have been found to be contaminated with dangerous amounts of arsenic or mercury, or contain medications such as steroids, hormones, diuretics and anti-inflammatories. Another hazard is the risk of an allergic reaction. Herbal products can contain a variety of allergens such as pollen, mould and mould spores.

Some herbal products, including herbal teas may:

- stimulate the uterus or cause uterine contractions.
- produce toxic effects on the developing baby.
- cause birth defects.
- cause infant deaths.
- pass through breast milk and harm the baby.

Herbal teas not recommended during pregnancy and breastfeeding

Aloe	Labrador
Buckthorn Bark	Lobelia
Coltsfoot	Pennyroyal
Comfrey	Sassafras
Duck Roots	Senna Leaves
Juniper Berries	

Some herbal teas may not appear on this list. As the safety of many herbal teas is unknown, all should be used with caution. Speak with your health care provider.

Source: Public Health Agency of Canada, February 2007.

The herbal teas (listed above) are NOT recommended during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

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What is the difference between tea and herbal tea?



Tea is a beverage made by steeping processed leaves, buds, or twigs of the tea bush, *Camellia sinensis*. The four basic types of true tea are black tea, oolong tea, green tea, and white tea.

The term herbal tea (also called tisane or ptisan) usually refers to infusions with fruit or other herbs that contain no *Camellia sinensis*. Herbal teas can be made with fresh or dried flowers, leaves, seeds and/or roots.

Are any herbal teas safe to drink during pregnancy and breastfeeding?

Some herbal teas (listed at right) are *generally* considered safe to drink during pregnancy and when breastfeeding, if taken in moderation. A moderate amount would be **no more than two to three cups (1 cup = 250 mL) of weak tea a day**. It is also a good idea to choose different herbal teas - do not drink the same one every day. But remember, to be on the safe side, consult with your health care provider before drinking *any* herbal teas (or using *any* herbal products).

Herbal teas *generally* considered safe during pregnancy and breastfeeding, if taken in moderation (2-3 cups/day)

Citrus peel

Orange peel

Ginger

Rose hip

Lemon balm

Source: Health Canada, 2005.

Buyer Beware

While some effects of herbs and herbal products are known, most are not. Therefore, until researchers know more about these products, it is best to use them with caution, especially when pregnant or breastfeeding. Babies and young children should never be given herbal drinks or other herbal products.

Do you still have questions about herbal teas during pregnancy and breastfeeding?

Call the Parent Talk Information Line to speak to a public health nurse.

905.688.8248 or 1.888.505.6074, ext. 7555

Adapted in part from materials by the public health nutritionists, Peel Public Health.



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