

Healthy Beginnings



Herbs and herbal teas: Safety during pregnancy or while breastfeeding

While pregnant or breastfeeding, what you put into your body may affect your baby. Whether you use herbs to prevent or treat a health problem or drink herbal teas to replace caffeinated drinks, read on to find out how to make a safe choice.

Possible dangers of herbs

Certain herbs may:

- Stimulate uterine contractions
- Have estrogen-like effects
- Affect blood pressure

Be careful about using herbs in the same way that you are careful about using prescriptions or over-the-counter medications.

Avoid herbs or herbal products that have not been licensed by Health Canada as a licensed natural health product.

Is the herbal product licensed in Canada?

Before using an herbal product, check to see if the product is licensed in Canada. Visit the [Licensed natural health products database](#) on Health Canada's website to see if there is a warning for women who are pregnant or breastfeeding.

You can also see if a product has been licensed for sale in Canada by looking for the eight-digit Natural Product Number (NPN) or Homeopathic Medicine Number (DIN-HM) on the label. However, a NPN or

DIN-HM doesn't mean it is safe to use during pregnancy or while breastfeeding.

Before taking any herb or herbal tea, talk to your health care provider or pharmacist.

Safe herbs and herbal teas

If you are unsure about the safety of an herb or herbal tea, it is best to avoid it until you talk to your health care provider or pharmacist.



Watch out for caffeine too

Although caffeine is not an herb, it can be found in certain teas, coffee, cocoa, carbonated and energy drinks, kola, guarana, yerba mate as well as cold and headache remedies. Too much caffeine (more than 300 milligrams per day) during pregnancy can cause low birth weight or miscarriage and when breastfeeding, may cause your baby to be cranky and have trouble sleeping.

See our fact sheet [Caffeine and your health](#).



Herbs may be found in certain teas and recipes. Certain herbs are considered safe as long as they are not in a capsule or supplement form. They include:

- Bitter orange or orange peel
- Echinacea
- Ginger
- Peppermint
- Red raspberry leaf
- Rose hip
- Rosemary

If you choose to drink an herbal tea from the list above, limit the amount to two to three cups (500 to 750 mL) per day.

Herbal teas should not take the place of more nutritious beverages. If you are thirsty, good choices that can be served warm or cold include:

- Water; try adding lemon, lime or orange slices for flavour
- Low-fat milk or chocolate milk
- Plain or flavoured fortified soy beverage
- 100% fruit or vegetable juice

Herbs and breastmilk production

If you choose to take an herbal supplement for breastmilk production, talk first to your health care provider or an International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC).

If you need help with breastfeeding or breastmilk production, you can speak to a public health nurse. To make an appointment at one of the free *York Region Breastfeeding clinics*, please call Health Connection at 1-800-361-5653 (TTY 1-866-252-9933). To access breastfeeding information online, visit www.york.ca/breastfeeding.

For more information

If you are unsure about a certain herb or herbal tea that you are taking or would like to take, check with your health care provider, a pharmacist or call Motherisk at 1-877-439-2744 or 416-813-6780. For additional resources, see Healthy Eating for New and Expecting Mothers at www.york.ca/nutrition.

You can speak to a registered dietitian at no cost by calling EatRight Ontario at 1-877-510-5102 or by going to www.ontario.ca/eatright.

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1-800-361-5653
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York Region Health Connection

Community and Health Services

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