

Same Exposure, Different Story: Why Advice Is Not One-Size-Fits-All

You are pregnant. You ask, “Can I take my medication?” If you ever heard, **“it depends...”**, you are not alone. Things affect people differently.

So, what is going on?

This has to do with genetics. Genetics is the study of genes. Genes are a part of our DNA. Genes tell your cells what to do. Genes tell us how to process the world around us.

What Do We Mean by “Exposures”?

Anything that comes into contact with your body is an exposure. Food, drinks, and drugs are exposures. Getting sick is an exposure. Stress is an exposure too.

Exposure questions can feel like a lot!

Why Can the Same Exposure Affect People Differently?

People can have the exact same exposure. Their bodies might handle it differently. That is because of metabolism. Metabolization is how fast our bodies break down an exposure. This affects how long an exposure stays in your body.

Genes affect how your body breaks down something. Genes shape how the body responds to an exposure.

What Are Some Examples?

- **Caffeine and Pregnancy**

Let us say that you got coffee with a friend at 3:00 pm. You might fall asleep easily that night. Your friend might feel jittery after half a cup. You and your friend have different responses to the same amount of caffeine. That difference comes from your genetics. Your genes might metabolize caffeine faster. This is why you fell asleep easily. Your friend

might metabolize caffeine more slowly. This is why your friend felt jittery.

Genes affect how fast caffeine is broken down. This is why caffeine during pregnancy rules are careful. It is suggested that you get 200 mg of caffeine (or less) per day during pregnancy. The rules are there to protect those that process caffeine more slowly.

The end message? There are rules about pregnancy. These rules are broad. Your experience might be different than what the rules say. For more information on caffeine, click here:
<https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/caffeine-pregnancy/>

- **General Anesthesia and Breastfeeding**

Let us say that your dentist tells you to get your wisdom teeth removed. This is a surgery. For this, you will get general anesthesia. General anesthesia is a mix of medication. This is given so that you can fall asleep for a procedure.

General anesthesia is broken down fast. Your friend got her wisdom teeth removed last year. She woke up 2 minutes after her surgery was done. You woke up 5 minutes after your surgery was done.

It takes some time for you to feel normal after general anesthesia. You might feel a little loopy right after general anesthesia. Your friend felt normal about 1 hour after her surgery. You felt normal about 3 hours after your surgery. You and your friend react differently to general anesthesia.

Genes affect how fast something is broken down by the body. This is why the rules for getting general anesthesia while breastfeeding are careful. It is suggested to wait to breastfeed if you still feel loopy. This means waiting to breastfeed until you feel “back to normal.”

The end message? Everyone needs a different amount of time to break down general anesthesia. The best time to breastfeed is different for everyone. For more information on general anesthesia, click here:
<https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/general-anesthesia-pregnancy/>

What Does This Mean for Pregnancy and Breastfeeding Advice?

People are different. People have different genes. This means that people break down exposures in a different way.

Most recommendations try to:

- Lower the chance of any possible problems;
- Help people who might break things down more slowly;
- Balance safety with needs.

Final Thoughts

What happens to your body during pregnancy and breastfeeding can feel so hard. It can feel harder when your body reacts differently than what is expected. If you compare yourself to others, you should know you did nothing wrong. You did not need to know better. You did not fail.

You might feel overwhelmed or worried about an exposure. You might feel frustrated if you get advice that clashes. Talking to MotherToBaby can help you get information without judgment.

Questions? Call 866.626.6847 | Text 855.999.3525 | Email or Chat at [MotherToBaby.org](https://www.MotherToBaby.org).

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