

St. John's Wort

This sheet is about exposure to St. John's wort in pregnancy and while breastfeeding. This information should not take the place of medical care and advice from your healthcare provider.

What is St. John's wort?

St. John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) is a flowering plant that has been used as an herbal supplement. It is available as a tablet or capsule, liquid extract, tea, and as a cream or ointment, sometimes mixed with other herbal ingredients.

St. John's wort has most commonly been used to help symptoms of mild to moderate depression. MotherToBaby has a fact sheet on depression at: <https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/depression-pregnancy/>.

There are many compounds in St. John's wort. The amount and quality of these compounds can vary widely and be affected by the soil the plant was grown in, and how the plant was harvested, dried, and stored. St. John's wort can interact with many medications, including birth control pills. If you are taking any medications, talk to your healthcare providers to review the chance of interactions between your medications and St. John's wort.

In the United States, St. John's wort is a dietary supplement. Unlike a prescription medication, it is not regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and does not have set standards for preparation, safety, or effectiveness. For information on supplements in general, please see the fact sheet on herbal products at <https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/herbal-products-pregnancy/>.

Sometimes when people find out they are pregnant, they think about changing how they take supplements or their medication. It is important to talk with your healthcare providers before making changes in how you take your medication or your supplements. Your healthcare providers can talk with you about the benefits of treating your condition and the risks of untreated illness during pregnancy. Your healthcare team may discuss medication options that have been studied for use in pregnancy.

I take St. John's wort. Can it make it harder for me to get pregnant?

There are no studies looking at whether St John's Wort makes it harder for to become pregnant.

Does taking St. John's wort increase the chance for miscarriage?

Miscarriage can occur in any pregnancy. One study found the chance for a miscarriage in people taking St. John's wort during pregnancy to be similar to that in the general population.

Does taking St. John's wort increase the chance of birth defects?

Every pregnancy starts out with a 3-5% chance of having a birth defect. This is called the background risk. Three studies that looked at pregnancies with use of St. John's wort did not find an increase in birth defects above the background risk compared to people taking prescription antidepressant medication.

Does taking St. John's wort in pregnancy increase the chance of other pregnancy related problems?

A study that included 39 people who reported using St. John's wort early in their pregnancies did not find a higher chance for preterm delivery (delivery before 37 weeks of pregnancy) or poor growth in the babies. There is one report of a person who started taking St. John's wort at week 24 of pregnancy and had a normal delivery; but they developed thrombocytopenia, a condition where the blood does not have enough platelets (cells that help your blood to clot). Some reports suggest that St. John's wort can affect how a person's blood clots. It is not known if the low platelet count in this case report was related to St. John's wort or to another factor.

Does taking St. John's wort in pregnancy affect future behavior or learning for the child?

Studies have not been done to see if St. John's wort can cause behavior or learning issues for the child.

Breastfeeding while taking St. John's wort:

St. John's wort gets into breastmilk. In five people who were breastfeeding full-term older infants (10-22 weeks of age),

the amount of St. John's wort that the infants received through breastmilk was found to be small. The parents reported no negative effects in their infants. Another study, looking at 33 people who took St. John's wort and breastfed, reported an increased frequency of colic and drowsiness when compared to a group of infants of people with depression who were not taking St John's wort. The infants did not need medical treatment.

If you suspect the baby has any symptoms from the St. John's wort such as colic, drowsiness, or poor feeding, contact the child's healthcare provider. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about all of your breastfeeding questions.

If a male takes St. John's wort, could it affect fertility (ability to get partner pregnant) or increase the chance of birth defects?

Effects on a man's fertility from taking St. John's wort have not been well-studied. In general, exposures that fathers or sperm donors have are unlikely to increase risks to a pregnancy. For more information, please see the MotherToBaby fact sheet Paternal Exposures at <https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/paternal-exposures-pregnancy/>.

Please click here for references.

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

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