

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. However, keep in mind 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).

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 tea made 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.

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

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Some herbal teas not recommended during pregnancy (this is *not* a complete list)

Aloe	Labrador
Buckthorn Bark	Lobelia
Chamomile	Pennyroyal
Coltsfoot	Sassafras
Comfrey	Senna Leaves
Duck Roots	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, 2009.

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

Some herbal teas (listed at right in box) are *generally* considered safe to drink during pregnancy and 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.

The Bottom Line...

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. Talk to your health care provider before using any herbal or natural health product. 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:

- ◆ EatRight Ontario: 1-877-510-5102 to speak to a registered dietitian.
- ◆ Parent Talk Line: 905-688-3762 or 1-888-505-6074 Ext. 7555 to speak to a public health nurse.