

Pharmacists issue advice for new and expecting mums ahead of Mother's Day

12 March 2021: Ahead of Mother's Day on 14 March the Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU) has issued healthcare tips to pregnant women and new mothers. For many new and expectant parents, the arrival of COVID-19 has changed the experience of pregnancy and may have brought added concerns for some. However, there are still lots of practical tips that can help make the process smoother.

Community pharmacist and former IPU President Kathy Maher said, "Pregnancy is an exciting time, but it can also be a worrying time for many women and their families. Pharmacists encounter this anxiety daily, with questions about medicines in pregnancy and breastfeeding a regular occurrence, in addition to concerns over the health of babies and children. With the additional worries associated with COVID-19, we are seeing anxiety levels heightened."

The IPU has provided the following useful advice for pregnant women and new mothers:

Pregnancy and beyond – Advice from Pharmacists

1. **Folic acid is recommended even before pregnancy:** A healthy diet is especially important if you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy. It's best to get vitamins and minerals from a varied, healthy diet, however it is also essential to take a folic acid supplement which helps to support your baby's healthy development. This is recommended for any woman who might become pregnant and should be taken daily if you are trying to conceive or are pregnant;
2. **Smoking while pregnant is harmful to you and your baby:** Quitting smoking can be difficult, but it is the only effective way to protect both yourself and your baby. Pharmacies can provide a range of treatments to help you kick the habit successfully;
3. **Ensure any medicines you take are safe for pregnancy:** Your pharmacist, GP or midwife can give you advice on whether medicines are safe during pregnancy. It is important not to stop taking prescribed medicines without informing your doctor;
4. **Most, but not all medicines can be taken while you are breastfeeding:** For example, medicines used to treat postnatal depression can be taken. However, some OTC medicines including codeine phosphate and some nasal decongestants are not recommended if you're breastfeeding. Always check with your pharmacist before taking any medicines while breastfeeding;
5. **Herbal remedies may not be safe during pregnancy:** It is important not to assume that just because something appears 'natural' that it will be healthy for your baby. Always

check, and if in doubt ask a professional for advice;

6. **Ibuprofen is not recommended during pregnancy:** Despite being a common over the counter painkiller, ibuprofen should not be taken during pregnancy unless prescribed by a doctor. If you require pain relief opt instead for paracetamol-based products and always seek advice if your symptoms persist; and
7. **Can I get the COVID-19 vaccine if I am breastfeeding, and if so can I continue to breastfeed?** There is little data on breastfeeding but no theoretical risk from these vaccines. If remnants get into breastmilk they get digested in the baby's stomach.

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