

Breastfeeding and Opioid Pain Medication

What is opioid pain medication?

Opioids [OH-pee-oidz] are strong pain medications available only by prescription. They are sometimes prescribed after surgery or childbirth. Your prescription may have brand names such as **Percocet**, or **Tylenol #3**. It may also include generic names such as **oxycodone** or **hydrocodone**.

Note: This handout does not discuss **anesthesia** [an-eh-STEEZ-ya], the pain control used during your procedure. Anesthesia medication leaves your body very soon after surgery and usually does not affect breast milk.

Why do I need opioid pain medication?

Controlling your pain after a procedure is very important. It makes you more comfortable and it helps you heal and recover. As you heal and recover, you can take better care of your baby and yourself. Your doctor may prescribe an opioid pain medication if you have had:

- A C-section (Cesarean section).
- A cut or tear in your vaginal area during childbirth. (These are rarely prescribed after a vaginal delivery if there is no cut or tear.)
- Any surgery or condition that causes severe pain.



Is it safe to breastfeed while I'm using opioid pain medication?

Yes. When these medications are taken as prescribed, the risk to your baby is small. Opioid pain medications have been shown to be safe when:

- You take only the amount as needed to control your pain
- You take them only for as long as prescribed. This is usually a short time—4 to 6 days or fewer.

Don't let concerns about your opioid pain medication stop you from breastfeeding. **The benefits of breastfeeding are greater than the risks of these medications.** If you don't keep breastfeeding, you risk losing your milk supply.

You do, however, need to take steps to limit the amount of pain medication that gets to your baby. **The instructions on the other side of this handout will help you breastfeed safely.**

How can I prepare before surgery?

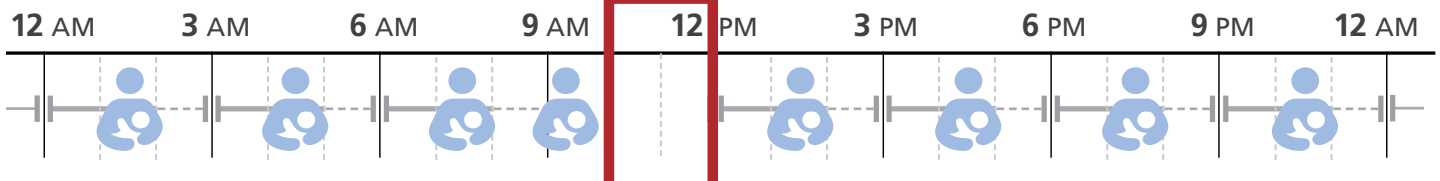
If you are going to have surgery, you can express (pump) and store milk for your baby ahead of time.

- **In the days before your surgery**, pump and freeze your milk so your baby will have it while you're in surgery. This milk can also be used if you don't feel like breastfeeding right after your surgery.
- **Just before going in to the operating room**, pump your milk. Make sure to bring your pump to the hospital.
- **Right after surgery**, pump if you don't feel like breastfeeding right away. This is important to help keep up your milk supply, and keep your breasts from getting too full and uncomfortable.

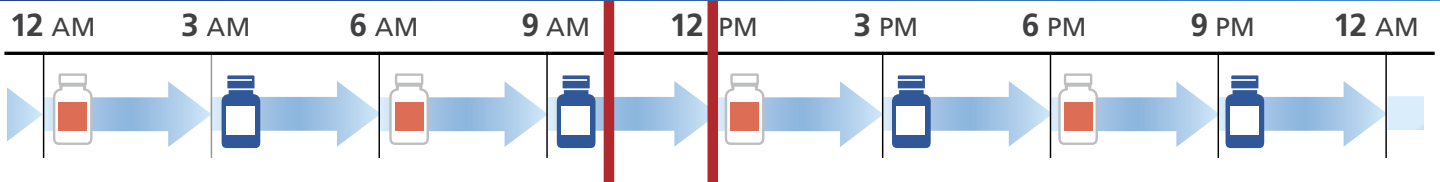
If you need a breast pump, or if you have questions about breastfeeding, ask to speak with your hospital's lactation consultant.

Sample schedule for taking opioids while breastfeeding

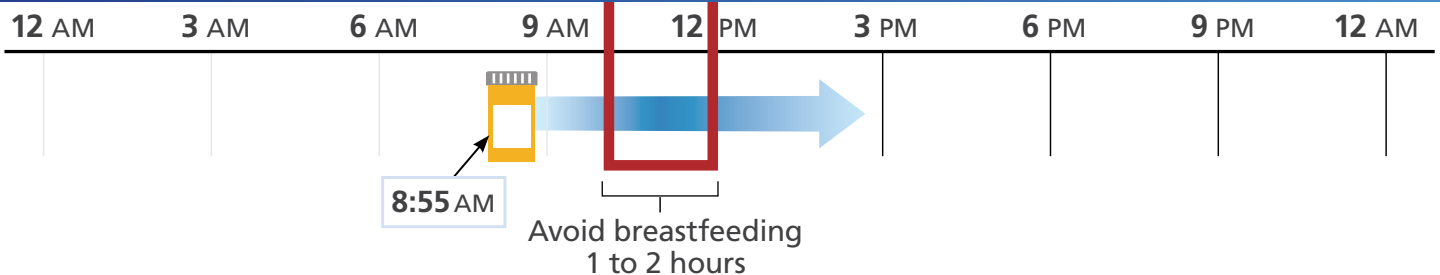
Breastfeeding Schedule: Every 2 to 3 hours



Safe Non-opioid Schedule: Every 3 hours



Opioid Medication: As needed for breakthrough pain



= Breastfeeding



= Acetaminophen



= Ibuprofen



= Opioid medication

Breastfeeding Schedule

Breastfeed **every 2 to 3 hours**.

Safe Non-opioid Schedule

Alternate between acetaminophen and ibuprofen **every 3 hours** for pain and swelling. Acetaminophen and ibuprofen can be taken safely at anytime during your breastfeeding schedule. Avoid taking opioid medication if your pain is managed with this cycle.

Opioid Medication

Take opioid medication for breakthrough pain as needed **right before** breastfeeding. When possible, avoid breastfeeding between 1 and 2 hours after taking the opioid. This is when it is at its highest level in your body. It is important to take the opioid medication **right before** breastfeeding so that **your baby is exposed to as little of the opioid medication as possible in your milk**.

Your doctor may prescribe opioid medication to take on a schedule of every 4 to 6 hours, **but only take as needed**.

How can I breastfeed safely?

To protect your baby while breastfeeding:

- **Tell your doctor about all medications you're taking.** Bring a list of all prescriptions, over-the-counter medications (like cough syrup or allergy pills), patches, inhalers, injections, vitamins, and herbal remedies you use. Tell your doctor if you use marijuana or street drugs, or drink alcohol.
Your baby's doctor will tell you if it's safe to use these while breastfeeding.
- **Always take your medication exactly as the doctor recommends.**
 - **If you've just delivered your baby,** you won't have much milk for about the first 4 days. By the time your milk comes in, it's best to manage pain with non-opioid medication like acetaminophen (Tylenol or others) or ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil, or others).
 - **If you've just had surgery,** your doctor will adjust your prescription to a level that's safe for your baby.
- **Take your pain medication right before feeding your baby (see schedule on page 2).** The pain medication is at its highest level in your body 1 to 2 hours after you take it. If you take it right before feeding, the medication should be out of your body before your next feeding.
- **Call your doctor if,** one week after your surgery or delivery:
 - You still need your prescription pain medication on a regular schedule (every 4 to 6 hours).
 - Your pain gets worse.

- **Do NOT take additional acetaminophen** [ah-see-tah-MIN-uh-fen]. Acetaminophen is the active ingredient in Tylenol and other pain relievers. Some prescription medications, including opioids, also contain acetaminophen. Taking too much acetaminophen can cause an overdose. **Do not take additional acetaminophen if you are taking opioids or another pain medication that contains acetaminophen.**

What should I watch out for?

If your baby shows any of the symptoms below, call your doctor. If you can't reach your doctor, go to the emergency room.

- Your baby is much sleepier than normal or is difficult to wake for feedings.
- Your baby's breastfeeding patterns change or your baby can't suck as well as usual.
- Your baby is constipated.

What should I do with my leftover medication?

Dispose of leftover medication at a drug collection site. Unused pills can be dangerous to leave around. You can find drop-off locations at these websites:

- Use Only As Directed (useonlyasdirected.org)
- U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (<https://apps2.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/pubdispsearch/spring/main?execution=e1s1>).

It's best not to flush medications down the toilet as they can contaminate the water supply.

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