

# Women and Substance Use

## RESOURCES AND TREATMENT OPTIONS



### The Importance of Seeking Recovery

Qualandria Bell

Substance use disorder can affect people of all types and can cause harmful side effects and health conditions. This is especially true in the case of pregnant women who are experiencing problems with drugs or alcohol. Substance use disorders can be incredibly harmful to both mother and child.

Surveys indicate that many women continue to use drugs or alcohol during their pregnancy with the numbers varying for different substances. Many of the substances used during pregnancy can easily pass through the placenta, directly impacting the health and growth of the fetus. Thus, it's important for women struggling with addiction to seek help before trying to get pregnant or as soon as they learn they are pregnant.

While overcoming a substance use disorder may seem daunting, it's the best decision that can be made for both mother and child. There are several treatment options available to help pregnant women in recovery.



### Substance Use Recovery & Management in Pregnancy

The optimal management strategy for pregnant women with substance use disorder or SUD begins with comprehensive prenatal care. The next step is counseling and educating them about the consequences of tobacco, alcohol, and drug use related to themselves and their unborn child and encouraging them to discontinue or reduce usage.

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### Substance-Focused Treatment for Women

Kallio Hunnicutt-Ferguson, PhD, ABPP

The majority of the population uses some type of substance (even if only caffeine). Substance use problems are therefore considered on a continuum from none to mild to severe (APA, 2022). It is now understood that substance use disorders (SUDs) are a chronic brain disease, similar to other chronic health conditions like diabetes, asthma, or depression (Heilig et al., 2021). An SUD is defined as substance use (alcohol, illicit or other drug use, or misuse of prescription medications) that causes impairment in the ability to fulfill major obligations at work, school, or home. This can also include continued use of the substance despite it causing problems, or experiencing withdrawal symptoms when not using the substance. Individuals with a substance use disorder may also develop a tolerance to the substance in which they need more of the substance to achieve the same effect (APA, 2022). For those who are noticing impairment or problems developing from their substance use, more formal treatment or increasing supports may be recommended.

Women are affected differently by substance use than men, and experience what is called a "telescoping effect", which means that they experience a more rapid progression to substance use disorder compared to men, experience a higher blood alcohol content with the same amount of alcohol compared to men, and have unique negative health effects of substances, including increased risk of certain types of cancer, fertility issues, greater risk of liver disease, heart damage, and increased risk of mortality (Ait-Dauoud et al., 2019).

Women are often underrepresented in substance-focused treatment centers, which can be a barrier to seeking care. Women may benefit from seeking substance-focused treatment from a center that serves women only or specializes in treating women. Several such programs exist in the state of Georgia and nationally (see below). These programs are able to tailor their approach in ways that address the unique needs of women, such as taking a trauma-informed approach, providing childcare or family support, and assisting in work placement following or as part of treatment (Rutman et al., 2020; Louw, 2018).

There are several evidence-based treatments for specific substances. Medication management is an important part of treatment for a substance use problem. Naltrexone, disulfiram, or acamprosate, are FDA approved medications for alcohol use disorder (NIAA, 2021). Buprenorphine, methadone, and naltrexone, are FDA approved treatments for opioid use disorder. Buprenorphine and naltrexone can be prescribed by medical doctor. Methadone has to be administered by a federally regulated clinic if provided in an outpatient setting (NIDA, 2021). Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Motivational Interviewing/Motivational Enhancement Therapy, and Behavioral Couples and Family Counseling are examples of evidence based psychotherapies for substance use problems.

### Medication Assisted Treatment

Taylor Neither, MPH

Different "levels of care" can be recommended based on the severity of the substance use problem. This ranges from medically managed detoxification and inpatient treatment to residential treatment, partial hospitalization, intensive outpatient, and outpatient services (ASAM, 2022). MAT or medication assisted treatment is an evidence based and effective method of treatment for those with a substance use disorder. This process utilizes FDA- approved medications to help patients recover and begin a new healthy lifestyle. Methadone has been used to treat pregnant women with opioid use disorder since the 1970s and was recognized as the standard of care by 1998. Since then, studies have shown that buprenorphine is also an effective treatment option. Along with medication, this treatment option also includes counseling (individual or group) and support from family and friends. Consult your healthcare provider to determine if MAT is right for you.



**What If I Have More Questions About the Effects of Substance Use During Pregnancy?**

**MotherToBaby Georgia Can Help**

Hailey Hazard, MPH, CHES

As the coordinator for MotherToBaby Georgia, I know that pregnancy can be both a joyful and challenging time. If you have used substances while pregnant, it is normal to have questions or concerns about the potential effects on your pregnancy. You might wonder what impact substances like alcohol, nicotine, prescription medications, marijuana, or other substances can have on your baby's well-being and development. You might also wonder where you can find accurate and trustworthy information.

At MotherToBaby we are dedicated to providing evidence-based information about exposures and their impacts on a developing pregnancy or breastfeeding baby. You can receive free confidential information by speaking directly with one of our specialists by telephone, text message, online chat, or email. Our team of experts are here to listen to your unique situation, without judgment, and address your specific questions and concerns.

You can also find more information on our website where there are many resources, including fact sheets and blogs on a variety of topics. Seeking accurate information about possible outcomes can help you and your healthcare team be prepared to best support the health of you and your little one. Let us know how we can help.

**MotherToBaby.org**  
**Email: MotherToBaby@emory.edu**  
**Call: 1-866-626-6847 (toll-free)**  
**Text: 1-855-999-3525**

**Local and National Resources**

Qualandria Bell & Taylor Neither, MPH

Resources can be hard to find when you are on an extensive search. There are many resource and treatment options for women who are concerned with their substance use. Here are a few to help guide your search:

- Resources for Substance Use Disorder for Pregnant Persons
  - gethelp.thefreedomcenter.com
  - 866-292-3554
- The Recovery Village Atlanta
  - recoveryatlanta.com
  - 884-514-1289
- Best Rehab Center near me
  - southeastaddiction.com
  - 770-741-2544
- SAMHSA's National Helpline
  - 1-800-662-HELP (4357)



Go to [findtreatment.gov](http://findtreatment.gov) (or scan the QR code above) to find treatment for mental health and substance use disorders in the United States and its territories.



**Forms of Treatment**

Taylor Neither, MPH

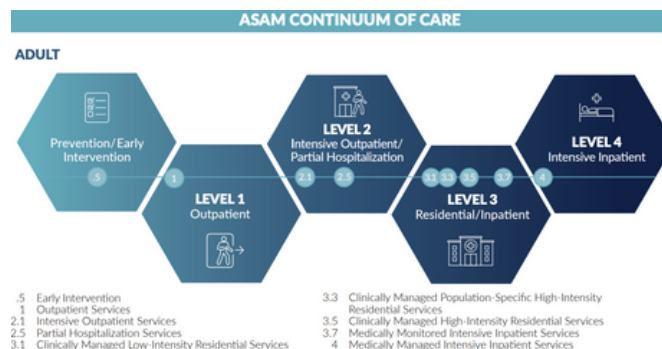
Treatment can be defined as a session of medical care as well as the administration of a dose of medicine. There are a variety of evidence-based methods that contribute to both in house (inpatient) or outpatient treatment programs.

**Inpatient**

Choosing an inpatient treatment option allows for recovery to occur within a treatment facility with various health care professionals. It is a more guided treatment option that is often chosen if or when an individual could benefit from a medical team directing the treatment and recovery process.

**Outpatient**

Outpatient treatment is an alternative for inpatient substance use disorder treatment. This course of action allows those who are in recovery to continue living at home and commuting to the treatment facility to undergo the appropriate therapy method.

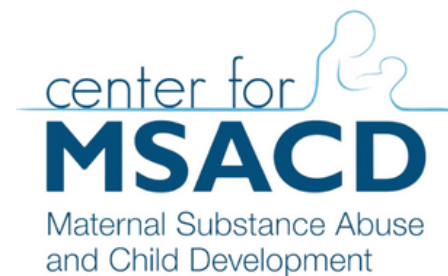


**HEALTHy Brain and Child Development**

Qualandria Bell

The HEALTHy Brain and Child Development Study is a federally funded research project a part of the NIH's larger initiative, Helping to End Addiction Long-term (HEAL), which is a multi-agency effort to curb the national opioid crisis. The HBCD study aims to address the gaps in our knowledge of how environmental exposures, especially opioid and other drug use, affect infant and child brain development and to contribute to our understanding of normal cognitive, behavioral, social, and emotional function from the prenatal period through childhood. Researchers will collect information during pregnancy and through early childhood, including mental health backgrounds, economic status, and saliva samples. The HBCD Study begins with 3-4 visits in the first year with only 1-2 visits in subsequent years.

[www.hbcdstudy.org](http://www.hbcdstudy.org)



American Addiction Foundation (AAF). What is MAT for Opioid Use Disorder? American Addiction Foundation website. What is MAT for Opioid Use Disorder (Medication Assisted Treatment)? (americanaddictionfoundation.com) American Psychiatric Association. (2022). Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (5th ed., text rev.). <https://doi.org/10.17766/books.3780996-023787> American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM). What is the ASAM Criteria? American Society of Addiction Medicine website <https://www.asam.org/resources/the-asam-criteria/> Hellig, M., Mackillop, J., Martinez, D., Stebb, J., Leggio, L., & Vondracek, L. (2021). Addiction as a brain disease revisited: why it still matters, and the need for consistency. *Neuropsychopharmacology*, 46, 1775-1723. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41386-020-00950-y> Louw, K.A. (2018). Substance use in pregnancy: The medical challenge. *Obstetric Medicine*, 11, 54-65. National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA). (2021). Medications to treat opioid use disorder research report. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAA) (2021). Treatment for alcohol problems: finding and getting help. Butman, D., Hubberten, C., Poole, N., Schmidt, R., & Van Bibber, M. (2020). Multi-service prevention programs for pregnant and parenting women with substance use and multiple vulnerabilities: Program structure and clients' perspectives on wraparound programming. *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth*, 20. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12884-020-03050-1>