



Advice from Dr. Weiss

This month:
Creative mama seeks
nursing advice

I'm a portrait artist, 33 weeks pregnant with my first baby. After doing some research, I stopped working with my art materials around 3 months along. I hope to begin working again a few days a week once the baby comes. My studio will be outside the home, but I'm still worried toxins will transfer to my son through breast milk. Am I being overly cautious?

As an artist, you can be exposed to toxins in your materials, mostly metals like lead, cadmium, manganese, and arsenic. However, these metals don't absorb easily through the skin. As long as you don't cover a large skin surface with pigments that contain metal, you're fine. Breathing fumes from the materials and eating while you work can also expose you to toxins. So you should work in a well-ventilated area, and stop and wash your hands before you eat,

preferably breaking in another room with clearer air.

When it comes to breast milk, metals accumulate there in much lower levels than those found in maternal blood. Exposure in the womb, through maternal blood, is a much greater concern for baby. If you'd like to start working again now while you're pregnant, you could have your blood tested for metals and if it's normal, no worries—as long as you follow the precautions mentioned above. And if you're still following those guidelines when you're nursing, I see no harm in starting to paint again. Be sure to wash your hands before you nurse baby, and don't feed him in your studio.

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Doula Jill Says

This month:
Mom, the doula stays!

My mother doesn't understand why I don't want her in the delivery room. My hospital allows two support people: I want my husband and my doula. Help!

I'm familiar with hospital policies that limit support people. There's a way around this, if you do want your mom with you: Your doula can bring her in for shifts, weaving a web of support.

However, it's also natural not to want your mom with you. Privacy and intimacy during delivery can be important for many women. And in your case a professional doula could be a better partner, because she's trained to help you make the psychological shift from maiden to mother.

It sounds like you've already asked for what you need, and your mom is resistant. She may just genuinely want to support

you. Open the conversation again and say, "I want to acknowledge your interest in supporting me in labor, but what I need is your emotional support. My doula is there for labor coaching, but you're in my baby's life forever as a grandmother. I assure you we'll keep in contact as birth starts, but we want the actual birth closed."

Celebrating your mother's birth into being your baby's grandmother and acknowledging her loving attention should bring her around. But this won't be the last time you'll need to carve out boundaries. Learn to let go of needing mom's approval with kindness and you'll start to sense your own rhythm as a mother.

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Ask Dr. Dana


This month:
Can baby come
party with me?

I have a “Sip-n-See” scheduled three weeks after my due date. A Sip-n-See is really common in the South; all your friends come over to see the baby and toast the new mom. My mother-in-law is very concerned that we will have the baby out and around so many people so soon. What do you think?

I have heard of the Sip-n-See tradition and have suggested a compromise to other moms, so they can celebrate the delivery and still guard baby’s health. Try this: Bring baby around for a viewing, then let your mother-in-law whisk him away, so you can enjoy a visit with your girlfriends. You want to make sure baby isn’t passed around; he’s not an hors d’oeuvre!

It’s important to be careful during the first few weeks, because if your new baby gets a fever, he’ll be admitted to the hospital for a blood test, a urine catheter, and a spinal tap. And that’s no fun for anyone. After six weeks, baby’s immune system is stronger and he’s better prepared for the outside world.

Similarly, I think it’s fine to take your new baby outside for a stroll in the first few weeks. Both mom and baby need a bit of fresh air every day, and this can happen as soon as you’re feeling up for it. A fresh air stroll will re-energize you, and also help your little one begin to differentiate days from nights.

But there are limits: Your new baby shouldn’t go to his cousin’s second birthday party, or be show-and-tell at big sister’s school. Keep your world small for those first few weeks. Remember, you’ve been waiting a long time for him, and he’s your most precious thing. 

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The advice provided in these columns is for informational purposes only and is not a substitute for medical diagnosis, advice, or treatment for specific medical conditions.