Although significant amounts of these drugs transfer into human milk and they are contraindicated during breastfeeding, they have a half-life of about eight hours (Hale, p. 52). A mother who takes one of these substances should interrupt breastfeeding for at least 24 to 48 hours, depending upon the dose.

**Marijuana**

The active ingredient in marijuana, THC, is concentrated in human milk. After a breastfeeding mother uses marijuana, THC is evident in her baby’s urine and stools (Perez-Reyes and Wall 1982). Urine screens on the baby will test positive for up to two to three weeks after a breastfeeding mother smokes marijuana (Hale, p. 105). Any second-hand smoke the baby would be exposed to increases the amount of the drug he receives. Because “street drugs” are rarely pure, marijuana may be laced with other drugs or substances that also may be harmful to the breastfeeding baby. One study found that during a baby’s first month of life marijuana exposure through mother’s milk was associated with decreased motor development at age one year (Astley and Little 1990).

Another concern, unrelated to how the baby is fed, is the probability that marijuana intoxication will impair a mother’s ability to care for her baby.

Marijuana is on the American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Drugs (2001) list of “Drugs of Abuse Contraindicated during Breastfeeding.”

**Cocaine**

Cocaine passes into the mother’s milk in significant amounts and can cause cocaine intoxication in her breastfeeding baby (AAP Committee on Drugs 2001). Reported symptoms in the baby include: irritability, vomiting, dilated pupils, tremors, and increased heart and respiratory rates. After exposure, cocaine has been found in mother’s milk for as long as 36 hours and in the baby’s urine for as long as 60 hours (Chasnoff 1987). It is recommended that a mother who has been exposed to cocaine interrupt breastfeeding for 24 hours (Hale, p. 179). Because “street drugs” are rarely pure, cocaine may be laced with other drugs or substances that also may be harmful to the breastfeeding baby.

In one reported case, a mother applied cocaine to her nipples to help relieve soreness. Three hours after the baby nursed through a nipple shield, the baby had convulsions and developed breathing problems (Chaney 1988).

Another concern, unrelated to how the baby is fed, is the probability that cocaine intoxication will impair a mother’s ability to care for her baby.

Cocaine is on the American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Drugs (2001) list of “Drugs of Abuse Contraindicated during Breastfeeding.”

**Heroin**

When a mother abuses heroin, the amount of the drug that passes into her milk is significant and can cause heroin addiction in her breastfeeding baby. Possible symptoms in the baby include tremors, restlessness, vomiting, and poor feeding (AAP Committee on Drugs 2001).