

# Health & FITNESS

## Drugs to avoid during pregnancy

By **GEORGE D. WILBANKS, M.D.**  
President The American College of  
Obstetricians and Gynecologists

Having a healthy baby is the primary concern for most pregnant women. To ensure that a baby is healthy, physicians advise women to practice healthy lifestyles even before they become pregnant. This includes avoiding drugs that may harm the developing fetus.

It is estimated that one in ten babies may be exposed to illegal drugs during pregnancy, yet an even higher number may be exposed to legal substances such as alcohol, tobacco, and some prescription medications. The effects of drugs on your child can have serious consequences — from birth defects to death. During the early stages of pregnancy, while body systems are forming, drugs can cause developmental damage. During the last 12 weeks of pregnancy, drugs can stunt fetal growth and cause preterm labor.

Illegal drugs — such as cocaine, marijuana, amphetamines, and narcotics — should never be used and especially not during pregnancy. For example, cocaine can cause high blood pressure in the mother, as well as stroke, heart attack, and sudden death.

You should not take any medication — even "over-the-counter" pain medications like aspirin — without your doctor's knowledge. Some prescription drugs can cause birth defects. These include isotretinoin (Accutane) for acne, which increases the risk of miscarriage and fetal defects; androgens for endometriosis, which cause growth restriction and mental retardation; and diethylstilbestrol (DES) for menstruation or menopause problems, which causes abnormalities of the cervix and uterus in a female fetus, and possible infertility in both male and female offspring. Other

drugs that can harm the fetus include lithium; the antibiotics streptomycin and tetracycline; anticoagulants used to treat blood clotting; antithyroid drugs used to treat an overactive thyroid gland; and anticonvulsants used for seizure disorders.

One word of caution: Don't stop taking any medication prescribed by a doctor without talking to him or her first. If you have a chronic condition such as epilepsy, your physician will determine the pros and cons of continued use during pregnancy. Together, you may be able to work out a special health plan, possibly changing drugs or adjusting dosages.

Avoid use of tobacco and alcohol. Inhaling cigarette smoke puts you at risk for a miscarriage, low birth weight, and vaginal bleeding. Alcohol during pregnancy may cause fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS), the most common cause of mental retardation in babies. Heavy drinking can also increase the risk of miscarriage.

Talk to your doctor about what is safest for you during pregnancy.

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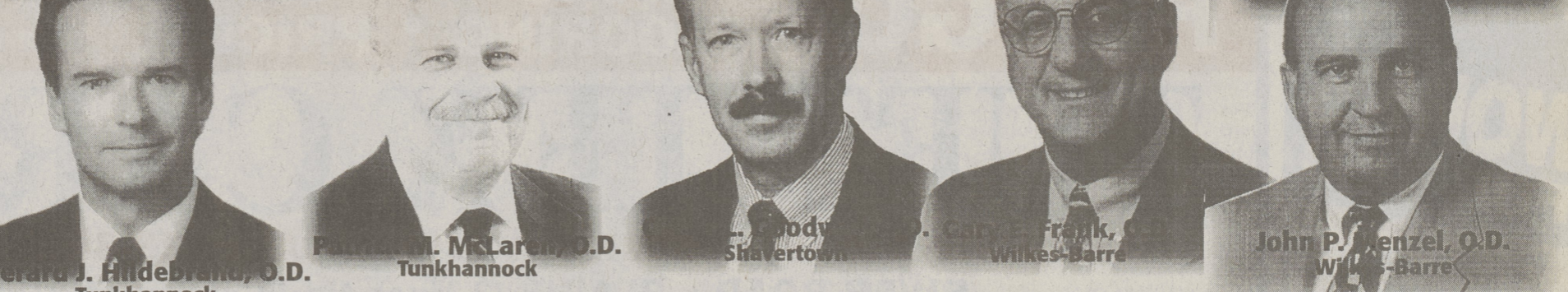
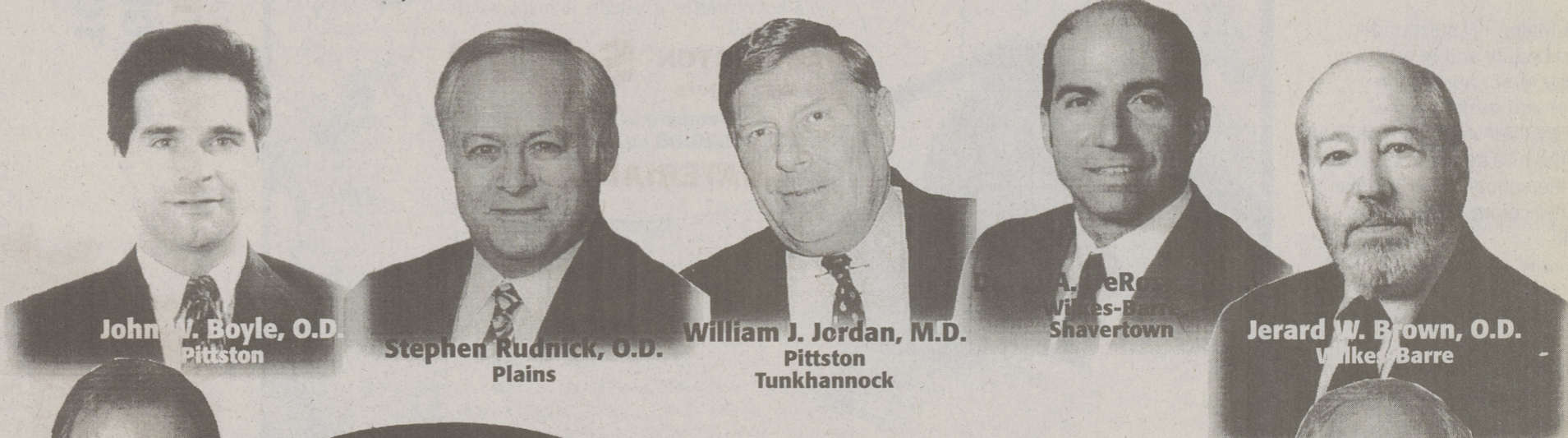
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**Occupational Therapy**  
Rte. 309-415 Plaza, Dallas  
674-5075

**Mercy Hospital**  
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**Wyoming Valley Health Care System:**  
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**Nesbitt Outpatient Diagnostic Center**  
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