Asthma - pregnancy and breastfeeding

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Summary

- Continue to take your asthma medications as prescribed when you are pregnant. It is important for your and your baby’s health that your asthma is well managed.
- Feeling breathless in late pregnancy is common, even in pregnant women who don’t have asthma.
- Breastfeeding for at least the first six months can significantly reduce your baby’s risk of developing childhood asthma and other allergies.

During pregnancy, some mothers-to-be may feel uneasy about taking medications. However, it is important to the health of both mother and baby that the mother’s asthma is well managed.

Your baby will do best if you are breathing well and easily. Uncontrolled asthma during pregnancy, and the stress and worry about uncontrolled asthma, has been linked to poorer outcomes for both baby and mother.

Work with your doctor to create a written asthma action plan and have it reviewed at regular times during your pregnancy to make sure you are getting the best asthma care possible.

Your asthma may change during pregnancy

Pregnancy can mean a change in a woman’s asthma. For some women, their asthma worsens and for others it improves, while others experience no change at all. As the baby grows and the womb gets bigger, some women feel breathless, particularly with physical activity. This is part of the normal changes that occur during pregnancy. If you are concerned, speak to your doctor.

Asthma medications are safe during pregnancy

Asthma medications are extremely safe and appropriate for use during pregnancy. Most asthma medications are inhaled, which delivers medication directly to the airways where it is needed, so a small dose can often be enough.

Asthma medication is not dependent on circulation through the bloodstream and, to some extent, bypasses the baby.

Discuss any concerns you have with your doctor before stopping any asthma medications, to make sure your asthma is controlled throughout your pregnancy.

Asthma during labour

Asthma attacks during labour are rare. However, you should make sure your asthma medication is always accessible, including when you are in hospital. If you have asthma symptoms during labour, take your reliever medication as usual.

Severe or unstable asthma during pregnancy

Uncontrolled asthma has been linked with premature births and low-weight babies. If your asthma is severe or unstable, your asthma action plan should include a plan for labour that takes anaesthetic options into account. This action plan needs the input of both your obstetrician and your asthma specialist.

Asthma and pregnancy – the health risks of smoking

You can improve and better manage your asthma if you don’t smoke. You can also avoid exposing yourself and your baby to a range of health risks.

Smoking has many damaging effects on your developing baby, including:
- risk of a premature birth
- lower birth weight, which can bring about other complications
- risk of fetal death (stillbirth) and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)
- risk of asthma and respiratory infections.

Pregnancy complications more commonly experienced by women who smoke include ectopic pregnancy, stillbirth, miscarriage, problems with the placenta, premature rupture of the membranes and premature labour.

So if you are pregnant, quitting smoking is ideal. If you need help to quit, see your health professional for information and advice or call Quitline.

Asthma and breastfeeding

Most asthma medications are safe to take during breastfeeding. If you are concerned, speak with your doctor.
Australia has one of the highest asthma rates in the world. The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates that more than 2.5 million Australians are affected by asthma.

Some of the factors that may have contributed to the rise in childhood asthma over the past decade include:

- increased exposure to viral infection while young
- changes in lifestyle
- exposure to house dust mites
- not enough oily fish in the Australian diet
- fewer women breastfeeding their newborn babies.

Breastfeeding your newborn baby for at least the first six months can significantly reduce your child’s risk of developing childhood asthma and other allergies.

Breastfeeding is a learned skill and it may take time for you and your baby to get it right. Some women give up trying to breastfeed because they are worried their baby might not be getting enough milk during the learning and establishing process.

If you are having trouble breastfeeding your baby, there are lactation experts available to help you, such as your midwife or maternal and child health nurse.

**Where to get help**

- Your doctor
- Obstetrician
- Midwife
- Pharmacist
- Asthma Australia (Victoria) Tel. 1800 ASTHMA (278 462)
- Maternal and child health nurse.

**References**

- Pregnancy and asthma, 2017, National Asthma Council of Australia.

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Please note that we cannot answer personal medical queries.

If you are looking for health or medical advice we recommend that you:

- talk to your doctor or pharmacist
- dial triple zero (000) in an emergency
- ring NURSE-ON-CALL Tel. 1300 60 60 24.

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Asthma

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- Asthma basics
  Careful diagnosis of adult onset asthma is important, because the symptoms can be confused with other conditions.
- Asthma and adults
  Many people with asthma find their symptoms can worsen when they are exposed to certain allergens like house dust mite, animal dander, pollen and mould.
- Asthma and thunderstorm asthma (video)
  Watch this overview about thunderstorm asthma to be prepared this pollen season.
- Asthma emergency first aid
  Asthma attacks need urgent emergency first aid. In an emergency, always call triple zero (000).
- Asthma explained
  Asthma cannot be cured, but with good management people with asthma can lead normal, active lives.
- Asthma first aid (video)
- Avoiding asthma triggers
  Asthma triggers are substances, conditions or activities that lead to symptoms of asthma. Asthma symptoms include difficulty breathing, coughing, wheezing and shortness of breath. These symptoms can...
- Diagnosing asthma
  Doctors do not have a single test to diagnose asthma so your doctor must understand your symptoms and eliminate other possible causes of your symptoms.
- Epidemic Thunderstorm Asthma
People who have asthma or hay fever can get severe asthma symptoms during pollen season when high grass pollen counts combine with a certain type of thunderstorm.

- Hay fever and thunderstorm asthma (video)

Children and teenagers

- Asthma and teenagers
  Asthma affects about one in ten teenagers in Australia.

- Asthma and thunderstorm asthma (video)
  Watch this overview about thunderstorm asthma to be prepared this pollen season.

- Asthma - Breathe easy (video)

- Asthma, children and smoking
  Exposure to second-hand smoke increases the risk of children developing asthma and provokes more frequent asthma in children with asthma.

- Asthma first aid (video)

- Asthma in childhood - triggers (video)
  Parents and children talk about some of the factors that can cause a child's asthma to flare up.

- Asthma in children
  Understanding asthma triggers for your child can help to reduce the risk of an asthma attack.

- Asthma – school and child care
  If your child has asthma, the childcare centre or school should have relevant action plans and staff trained to deal with asthma emergencies.

- Thunderstorm Asthma overview (video)
  Thunderstorm Asthma overview...

Managing asthma

- Asthma management
  An asthma action plan can help you take control of your asthma and feel confident managing it.

- Avoiding asthma triggers
  Asthma triggers are substances, conditions or activities that lead to symptoms of asthma. Asthma symptoms include difficulty breathing, coughing, wheezing and shortness of breath. These symptoms can...

- Thunderstorm asthma - Uday's story (video)
  What is thunderstorm asthma? Thunderstorm asthma is asthma that is triggered by a particular type of thunderstorm when there is high amounts of grass pollen in the air (typically between October and...)

- Asthma and complementary therapies
  It is important you discuss your asthma and preferred therapies with both your doctor and complementary therapist.

- Asthma medication
  Your doctor will prescribe the correct medications that can either help to relieve or prevent the symptoms of asthma.

- Hormones – cortisol and corticosteroids
  Cortisol helps to maintain blood pressure, immune function and the body’s anti-inflammatory processes.

- Asthma and thunderstorm asthma (video)
  Watch this overview about thunderstorm asthma to be prepared this pollen season.

- Thunderstorm Asthma overview (video)
  Thunderstorm Asthma overview...

- Thunderstorm asthma - Christine McDonald explains (video)
  Professor McDonald explains thunderstorm asthma.

- Asthma first aid (video)
• Hay fever and thunderstorm asthma (video)

Aspergillus

Aspergillus is a fungus that commonly grows on rotting vegetation. It can cause asthma symptoms...

• Asthma emergency first aid

Asthma attacks need urgent emergency first aid. In an emergency, always call triple zero (000)...

Living with asthma

• Asthma-friendly home

There are many ways in which you can transform your home into an asthma-friendly environment...

• Epidemic Thunderstorm Asthma

People who have asthma or hay fever can get severe asthma symptoms during pollen season when high grass pollen counts combine with a certain type of thunderstorm...

• Avoiding asthma triggers

Asthma triggers are substances, conditions or activities that lead to symptoms of asthma. Asthma symptoms include difficulty breathing, coughing, wheezing and shortness of breath. These symptoms can...

• Asthma and smoking

Breathing in other people's cigarette smoke can be harmful to a person with asthma, especially a child...

• Asthma and your workplace

Some industries are more likely to affect a person with asthma because of the triggers in the environment...

• Asthma – school and child care

If your child has asthma, the childcare centre or school should have relevant action plans and staff trained to deal with asthma emergencies...

• Asthma and food allergies

It is important to identify any foods or food chemicals that may trigger your asthma, but this must be done under strict medical supervision...

• Asthma and thunderstorm asthma (video)

Watch this overview about thunderstorm asthma to be prepared this pollen season...

• Thunderstorm Asthma overview (video)

Thunderstorm Asthma overview...

• Thunderstorm asthma - Christine McDonald explains (video)

Professor McDonald explains thunderstorm asthma...

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• Asthma-friendly home

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• Asthma explained

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• Asthma management

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• Flu (influenza)

Influenza (the flu) is caused by a virus. The flu is more than just a bad cold and can occasionally lead to serious complications, including death. Specific antiviral medication is available. It is...

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