Summary

If you smoke while you are pregnant you are at increased risk of a wide range of problems, including miscarriage and premature labour. Babies whose mothers smoke during pregnancy are at higher risk of SIDS, having weaker lungs and having a low birth weight. Low birth weight babies are at greater risk of death and are more vulnerable to infection, breathing difficulties and long-term health problems in adulthood. Stopping smoking completely as early as possible during pregnancy is best for your health and the health of your baby.

Smoking while pregnant exposes you and your unborn child to an increased risk of health problems. Passive smoking can also affect you and your unborn child. Australian studies showed that about 10 per cent of women smoked during pregnancy in 2016.

If you smoke while pregnant you are at increased risk of a wide range of problems including miscarriage and premature labour, and you are twice as likely to give birth to a low-birth-weight baby compared to a mother who does not smoke. Low birth weight babies are at greater risk of death and are more vulnerable to infection, breathing difficulties and long-term health problems in adulthood.

The more cigarettes you smoke during your pregnancy, the greater your risk of complications and having a low-birth-weight baby. However, there is no solid evidence that cutting down on the number or strength of cigarettes you smoke significantly reduces the risks to the fetus. Stopping smoking completely as early as possible is a much better option for the health of you and your baby.

Pregnancy complications from smoking

Some of the pregnancy complications more commonly experienced by women who smoke include:

- ectopic pregnancy – this is pregnancy outside the uterus, usually in the fallopian tube
- fetal death – death of the baby in the uterus (stillbirth)
- spontaneous abortion – known as miscarriage
- problems with the placenta, including early detachment from the uterine wall and blocking the cervical opening (placenta previa)
- premature rupture of the membranes
- premature labour.

Smoking during pregnancy – effects on the fetus

If you are pregnant, every time you smoke a cigarette, it cuts down oxygen to your unborn baby and exposes them to a cocktail of chemicals, including chemicals that cause cancer.

Some of the many damaging effects of cigarette smoke on the fetus include:

- reduced oxygen supply due to carbon monoxide and nicotine
- retarded growth and development
- increased risk of cleft lip and cleft palate
- decreased fetal movements in the womb for at least an hour after smoking one cigarette
- impaired development and working of the placenta
- changes in the baby’s brain and lungs.

Problems at birth due to smoking during pregnancy

Some of the problems caused by smoking during pregnancy include:

- increased risk of premature birth
- increased risk of miscarriage and infant death
- lower birth weight – on average, about 150 to 200 grams less than normal
- up to three times the risk of sudden unexpected death in infancy (SUDI).

Smoking and breastfeeding

Over two-thirds of women who quit when they are pregnant resume smoking after their babies are born. Although smoking and breastfeeding is not ideal, it is better than smoking and not breastfeeding. Stopping smoking during breastfeeding is very worthwhile.

Some of the problems caused by smoking while breastfeeding include:

- Some of the chemicals in cigarettes can pass from you to your baby through your breastmilk.
Smoking can reduce your milk production. Women who smoke are less likely to breastfeed and are more likely to wean their children earlier than mothers who do not smoke.

**Smoking during pregnancy can cause problems for your child in later life**

Smoking during pregnancy can impair your child’s health for years to come. Health effects may include:

- weaker lungs
- higher risk of asthma
- low birth weight, which is linked to heart disease, type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure in adulthood
- increased risk of being overweight and obese in childhood
- increased risk of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

**Pregnancy and quitting smoking**

Ideally, a pregnant woman should stop smoking. In reality, less than half of females quit when pregnancy is planned or confirmed. If you need help to quit, see your health professional for information and advice.

You can also call the Quitline (Tel. 13 7848). Quit Specialists will provide free support during your pregnancy and for some time after to help you remain a non-smoker. Aboriginal Quit Specialists are also available.

If you are finding it tough to stop smoking, don’t despair. There is evidence to suggest that stopping smoking by the fourth month of pregnancy can reduce some of the risks, such as low birth weight and premature birth.

**Nicotine replacement therapy during pregnancy**

It is recommended that you first try to quit without medication. However, if you are unable to quit, you may use nicotine replacement therapy (gum, lozenges, mouth spray, an inhalator, or 16-hour patches) to help you. While using these products is considered safer than smoking, even this smaller amount of nicotine may not be entirely risk-free for your baby.

If you are pregnant, it is important to consult your doctor before using nicotine replacement therapy to discuss the risks and benefits of using it. The Quitline specialists at the Quitline can help you decide what support is best for you.

**Where to get help**

- Your GP (doctor)
- Your obstetrician
- Quitline, Tel. 13 7848 (13 QUIT)

**References**

- Chamberlain C, O’Mara-Eves A, Oliver S et al., 2013, ‘Psychosocial interventions for supporting women to stop smoking in pregnancy’, The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, no. 10, CD001055.
- How tobacco smoke causes disease: the biology and behavioral basis for smoking-attributable disease: a report of the Surgeon General, 2010, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, USA.
- The health consequences of smoking – 50 years of progress: a report of the Surgeon General, 2014, US Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health.

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More information

Healthy pregnancy

The following content is displayed as Tabs. Once you have activated a link navigate to the end of the list to view its associated content. The activated link is defined as Active Tab

- Pregnancy and birth basics
- Stages of pregnancy
- Fertility issues and options
- Keeping healthy during pregnancy
- Health concerns during pregnancy
- Preparing for birth
- Preparing for a newborn

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Pregnancy and birth basics

- **Childbirth - pain relief options**
  Understanding your pain relief options can help you cope better with the pain of childbirth.

- **Pregnancy - labour**
  Labour is divided into three stages. The first stage is dilation of the cervix from 0 to 10 cm, the second stage is birth of the baby, and the third stage is delivery of the placenta. Labour typically...

- **Pregnancy - premature labour**
  Sometimes, babies arrive early. It’s important to recognise premature labour, in case you and your baby need medical care...

- **Contraception after giving birth**
  After having a baby, you need to choose an effective method of contraception if you don’t want to have another baby straight away...

- **If you want to get pregnant, timing is everything**
  If you are trying for a baby, to increase your chances of conceiving, it helps to know when you are at your most fertile, and when is the best time to have sex...

- **Pregnancy testing**
  Sometimes, a home pregnancy test may be positive when a woman isn’t pregnant...

- **Folate for pregnant women**
  Even women who aren’t planning to have a baby should increase their folate intake in case of unplanned pregnancy...

- **Pregnancy - unplanned**
  When a woman does not want to become a parent, her pregnancy options may include abortion or adoption...

- **Contraception - emergency contraception**
  It is best to take emergency contraception as soon as possible, ideally within 24 hours of having unprotected sex, but it still works well within 96 hours (four days)...

**Stages of pregnancy**

- **Baby due date**
  Pregnancy is calculated from the first day of your last period, not from the date of conception...

- **Pregnancy - week by week**
  Pregnancy is counted as 40 weeks, starting from the first day of the mother’s last menstrual period...

- **Planning for labour and birth**
  Some of the signs and symptoms of going into labour may include period-like cramps, backache, diarrhoea and contractions...

- **Conceiving a baby**
  The odds of a young fertile couple conceiving by having sexual intercourse around the time of ovulation (the release of the egg from the ovary) are approximately one in five every month. Around nine...

- **Pregnancy stages and changes**
  It’s helpful to have an idea of how your body may react to the different stages of pregnancy. It also helps to know how pregnancy may affect your emotions and feelings...

**Fertility issues and options**

- **Adoption**
  Adoption can give a secure family life to children who can’t live with their birth family...

- **Surrogacy**
  Surrogacy is a form of assisted reproductive treatment (ART) in which a woman carries a child within her uterus on behalf of another person or couple...

- **If you want to get pregnant, timing is everything**
  If you are trying for a baby, to increase your chances of conceiving, it helps to know when you are at your most fertile, and when is the best time to have sex...

- **Abortion**
  All women should have access to accurate information about abortion so they can make their own informed decisions...

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Age and fertility
Age affects the fertility of both men and women, and is the single biggest factor affecting a woman's chance to conceive and have a healthy baby.

Infertility in men
A couple isn't suspected of fertility problems until they have tried and failed to conceive for one year.

Infertility in women
The odds of a young fertile couple conceiving by having sexual intercourse around the time of ovulation are approximately one in five every month.

Weight, fertility and pregnancy health
Compared with women in the healthy weight range, women who are carrying extra weight are less likely to conceive.

Keeping healthy during pregnancy

Pregnancy - morning sickness
Morning sickness is typically at its worst early in the day but it can strike at any point during the day or night.

Postnatal exercise - sample workout
Make sure your abdominal muscles have healed before you do any vigorous tummy exercises, such as crunches.

Healthy eating during pregnancy - tucker talk tips
Some foods should be avoided during pregnancy as they carry bacteria that could harm your unborn baby.

Postnatal exercise
Always consult with your doctor or midwife before starting any postnatal exercise program.

Pregnancy and your mental health
Finding out you are pregnant can be a very exciting time. But it can also make you feel uncomfortable, unwell, worried and make you wonder how you are going to cope. And it doesn’t stop when the baby...

Pregnancy and teeth
It’s important to look after your teeth and gums when you’re pregnant, as gum disease can affect your baby.

Tests, scans and checks - pregnancy and labour
Tests can confirm your pregnancy and also monitor your baby's development in the womb.

Alcohol and pregnancy
There’s no safe level of alcohol use during pregnancy. It’s safest to not drink at all during pregnancy, when trying to conceive, and while breastfeeding.

Pregnancy and smoking
Smoking while pregnant exposes a woman and her unborn child to an increased risk of health problems.

Immunisation and pregnancy
Immunisation can protect a woman and her unborn baby against many infectious diseases.

Folate for pregnant women
Even women who aren't planning to have a baby should increase their folate intake in case of unplanned pregnancy.

Pregnancy and exercise
Unless you have complications, you should be able to exercise throughout your pregnancy.

Pelvic floor
Pelvic floor exercises are designed to improve muscle tone and prevent the need for corrective surgery.

Pregnancy and diet
Good nutrition during pregnancy can help to keep you and your developing baby healthy.

Pregnancy and travel
Travelling to developing nations is not encouraged during pregnancy, due to the risk of disease and the standard of medical facilities.

Health concerns during pregnancy
betterhealth.vic.gov.au
- Miscarriage and Stillbirth - Coming to terms (video)

- Pregnancy - bleeding problems
  Bleeding from the vagina in early pregnancy happens in almost one in four pregnancies..

- Newborn bloodspot screening (video)
  Every newborn baby in Australia is offered a newborn bloodspot screening test to identify those at risk for rare, but serious, medical conditions including PKU, hypothyroidism and cystic fibrosis.

- Placenta previa
  Placenta previa means the placenta has implanted at the bottom of the uterus, over the cervix or close by..

- Placental abruption
  Placental abruption means the placenta has detached from the wall of the uterus, starving the baby of oxygen and nutrients..

- Pregnancy - pre-eclampsia
  There is no evidence that pre-eclampsia is caused by emotional stress, working too hard or not getting enough rest..

- Lupus and pregnancy
  Lupus can be controlled with medications, so the majority of affected women are able to have children..

- HIV and women - having children
  Women living with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), or women whose partner is HIV-positive, may wish to have children but feel concerned about the risk of transmission of the virus to themselves if..

- Alcohol and pregnancy
  There’s no safe level of alcohol use during pregnancy. It’s safest to not drink at all during pregnancy, when trying to conceive, and while breastfeeding..

- Pregnancy and smoking
  Smoking while pregnant exposes a woman and her unborn child to an increased risk of health problems..

- Pregnancy - obstetric emergencies
  An obstetric emergency may arise when a woman is pregnant, or during her delivery. In this case, extra care is needed. A woman may need a lot of tests and treatments, and extended hospital stays. She..

- Postnatal depression (PND)
  Postnatal depression can happen either a few days or weeks after the birth, with a slow or sudden onset..

- Molar pregnancy
  Most molar pregnancies are diagnosed when bleeding early in pregnancy prompts an ultrasound scan..

- Miscarriage
  A range of feelings is normal after a miscarriage, and they often linger for some time..

- Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD)
  The World Health Organization recommends that pregnant women should avoid alcohol..

- Asthma - pregnancy and breastfeeding
  Pregnant women with asthma need to continue to take their asthma medication as it is important to the health of both mother and baby that the mother's asthma is well managed..

- Pregnancy and diet
  Good nutrition during pregnancy can help to keep you and your developing baby healthy..

- Birth defects explained
  The cause of birth defects is often unknown, speak to your GP if you are at increased risk of having a baby with a congenital anomaly..

- Ectopic pregnancy
  Ectopic pregnancy is caused by a fertilised egg not being able to move through the fallopian tube..

- Diabetes - gestational
  Gestational diabetes is diabetes that occurs during pregnancy and usually disappears when the pregnancy is over..
Preparing for birth

- **Pregnancy - care choices**
  It's very important for you and your baby to be looked after from the start of your pregnancy until after the birth of your baby.

- **Pregnancy - labour**
  Labour is divided into three stages. The first stage is dilation of the cervix from 0 to 10 cm, the second stage is birth of the baby, and the third stage is delivery of the placenta. Labour typically...

- **Pregnancy - premature labour**
  Sometimes, babies arrive early. It's important to recognise premature labour, in case you and your baby need medical care.

- **Packing for hospital**
  Packing for hospital is an exciting part of preparing for the birth of your baby.

- **Planning for labour and birth**
  Some of the signs and symptoms of going into labour may include period-like cramps, backache, diarrhoea and contractions.

- **Twins - identical and fraternal**
  Multiple births are more common due to the advancing average age of mothers and the rise in assisted reproductive techniques.

Preparing for a newborn

- **Breastfeeding - the first days**
  Let your baby feed as much as they want in the first few days to help establish good breastfeeding patterns.

- **Breastfeeding - when to start**
  Breastfeeding within the first hour after birth allows your baby to behave instinctively and breastfeed with little intervention.

- **Alcohol and pregnancy**
  There's no safe level of alcohol use during pregnancy. It's safest to not drink at all during pregnancy, when trying to conceive, and while breastfeeding.

- **Vitamin K and newborn babies**
  With low levels of vitamin K, some babies can have severe bleeding into the brain, causing significant brain damage.

- **Postnatal depression (PND)**
  Postnatal depression can happen either a few days or weeks after the birth, with a slow or sudden onset.

- **Baby furniture - safety tips**
  Even if your baby furniture meets every safety standard and recommendation, your child still needs close supervision.

- **Newborn bloodspot screening**
  Every newborn baby in Australia is offered a newborn bloodspot screening test to identify those at risk of rare, but serious, medical conditions.

Related Information

- **Pregnancy and diet**
  Good nutrition during pregnancy can help to keep you and your developing baby healthy.

- **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.

- **Pregnancy and your mental health**
  Finding out you are pregnant can be a very exciting time. But it can also make you feel uncomfortable, unwell, worried and make you wonder how you are going to cope. And it doesn’t stop when the baby...

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- **Lupus and pregnancy**
  Lupus can be controlled with medications, so the majority of affected women are able to have children.

Home
Related information on other websites

- Care for women with drug and alcohol issues – The Royal Women's Hospital.
- Pregnancy and quitting – Quit Now

Support Groups

- Pregnancy, birth and baby

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