

SMOKING DURING PREGNANCY

How To Quit

Are you thinking of having a baby or are you already pregnant? If you're a smoker, you have probably also been thinking about putting away the cigarettes for good!

Pregnancy can be such a great motivation for quitting! You are excited about this pregnancy and you want to give your baby every chance for good health. And if you have tried to quit in the past and were less than successful, take heart! The person most likely to be successful in quitting is someone who has tried to quit before.

Is it really important that you quit for pregnancy? Yes, most definitely. Smoking cigarettes can, and very often does, harm the fetus. Everyone already knows smoking mothers tend to have smaller babies: The warning is on every package of cigarettes. But to some mothers, a smaller baby doesn't sound all that bad.

The problem lies in the fact that anything that blocks or slows the growth of the baby can also slow or retard the growth of the baby's brain. Cigarette smoke contains hundreds of chemicals, many of which can cause problems for a developing fetus. Smoking can actually reduce the amount of oxygen and nutrients your baby receives by constricting the vessels that transport blood to the baby.

Carbon monoxide, which reaches higher levels in the fetus than in the mother, reduces the amount of oxygen available for the developing baby by as much as 20 percent. Nicotine causes fetal blood vessels to constrict, thus further reducing fetal oxygen and nourishment. After a woman quits, her blood oxygen level can go up as much as 8 percent within 48 hours. Cyanide in cigarettes can reduce the baby's ability to process vitamin B12, which developing babies need to manufacture protein and red blood cells.

Smoking increases the risk of birth defects, pre-term births, miscarriages, and low birth weight. Babies exposed to nicotine in the womb average one-half pound less weight and one-half inch shorter in length. They also tend to be harder to calm when crying.

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) is twice as frequent among babies whose mothers smoke during pregnancy, which suggests damage to respiratory centers in the brain (American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists 1997). Children whose mothers smoked during pregnancy score lower in reading and math, and they tend to grow more slowly.

There is some evidence that being exposed to cigarette smoke during infancy predisposes the child to cigarette addiction in adulthood. This has raised the question of whether that applies to smoking during pregnancy, an extremely likely situation.

Even secondhand smoke has been associated with the above affects on newborns. Pregnancy women should avoid smokers, ask household members who smoke to smoke outside, and, when in public, sit in nonsmoking areas.

Need extra help quitting? You can find it at this website www.women.smokefree.gov