

SMOKING AND PREGNANCY

The evidence that cigarette smoking may have harmful effects on the fetus is strong. It is also clear that maternal smoking reduce average birth weight. The effects of smoking on other perinatal outcome is more controversial.

Ideally all health professionals should promote tobacco free lifestyles and culture. They can also have an impact at national and international level through their associations by influencing policy changes for better tobacco control and progressive reduction in cigarette smoking in the whole society. Health professional organization could actively participate in World No Tobacco day every 31st May, ban all forms of tobacco advertising, make public areas non-smoking and should include tobacco control in the agenda of all relevant health related congress and conferences.

Cigarette smoke contains harmful components for pregnant women like nicotine, carbon monoxide and cyanide. These substances have been found to cross the placenta and reach the baby. One of the concerning effects of smoking during pregnancy is that the baby's growth is restricted. A baby of a woman who smokes weighs on an average 170 to 200 grams lighter. The reason for smaller babies is that cigarette smoking restricts blood vessels therefore reducing the amount of nutrition and oxygen to the baby. With increasing incidence of respiratory problems like asthma, these babies are more prone to becoming ill after birth. Some may die either at birth or within the first year.

Research has found potential effects of smoking during pregnancy. Smoking increases chances of genetic abnormalities with increased incidence of cleft lip, cleft palate, problems with bowel, eyes, ears and spinal deformities. There is also association with the placental abnormality.

Smoking during pregnancy leads to higher risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). There is also evidence to show that if the father smokes while the mother is pregnant, SIDS is

also increased. Babies should be kept in a smoke free environment after birth as it helps to reduce the incidence of SIDS.

Smoking limits the amount of nutrients and oxygen that reach the fetus. Smoking may also cause miscarriages, still births. Children born to smoking mothers may also suffer more colds and other lung problems, and may have learning difficulties, and behavioral problems. Woman should not also smoke while breast feeding because the chemicals in cigarette smoke can enter the breast milk as well.

Some of the effects of smoking while pregnant may not be apparent at birth, but are seen as the child starts to grow.

Exposure to second hand smoke, also called involuntary smoking, occurs when non-smokers breath in the cigarette smoke from others around them. Second hand smoke is harmful to both pregnant women and infants. New studies show that if a woman's partner smokes near her during her pregnancy, there are added risks. She has a greater chance of having a baby that weighs too little and may have health problems. Children exposed to secondhand smoke are at greater risk for colds, respiratory problems, ear infections and reduced lung function.

Tips to Stop Smoking

The best time to quit is when the woman thinks she will get pregnant in the near future. If she does quit, her baby will probably weigh the same as the baby of a woman who has never smoked. Or if she quits within the first three or four months of her pregnancy she can lower her baby's chance of being born too small and with lots of health problems. Even if a woman quits at the end of her pregnancy, she can help her baby get more oxygen and have a better chance of making it. Reducing frequency of smoking may not benefit the baby. A pregnant woman who reduces her smoking pattern or switches to lower tar cigarettes may inhale more deeply or take more puffs to get the same amount of nicotine as before.

The following tips for helping a pregnant woman stop smoking:

- Write down why you want to stop smoking.
- Choose a "Quit Day" sometime in the next two weeks.
- Ask a nonsmoking "buddy", like your partner or a friend, to help you quit.
- Throw out all cigarettes, ash trays, matches and lighters on your "Quit Day".
- Stay away from places and activities that make you want to smoke.

When you feel like smoking, do one of these instead:

- Brush your teeth.
- Go for a walk.
- Call a friend.
- Drink water or juice.
- Chew sugarless gum or eat carrot sticks.
- Take a deep breath and count to five. Let the air out slowly. Do this five times.
- Refer back to your list of reasons for quitting.
- Keep your hands busy. Find things to do with your hands so you can't hold a cigarette.
- Tell yourself, "I can quit smoking".

