

Smoking and pregnancy

other titles in this series

THE TRUTH ABOUT...

Smoking

Spit tobacco

*Environmental tobacco
smoke (ETS)*

Smoking and pregnancy

Options for quitting smoking

*What to expect when
quitting smoking*

If you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, you might be thinking of changes you can make to improve your health and to protect your baby's health. Quitting smoking can be a good place to start.

Does tobacco smoke hurt my baby?

Yes it does. When you smoke, so does your baby. Carbon monoxide (a toxic gas), nicotine, and other harmful chemicals from the smoke enter your bloodstream and pass into your baby's body. They keep the baby from getting the food and oxygen it needs for growth.

How can I protect my baby from tobacco smoke?

If you smoke, the best thing you can do to protect your health and your baby's health is to quit. Here are some ways that both you and your baby will benefit if you quit.

Benefits for you

Your baby isn't the only one who will benefit if you quit smoking. There are many health benefits that start as soon as you quit. As an expectant mother, you can look forward to

- lower blood pressure and heart rate
- less risk of problems during labour and delivery

For more information about quitting smoking, refer to other topics in this series.

Benefits for your baby

If you quit smoking, you will help your baby get the food and oxygen he or she needs. You will also reduce the risk

- of a miscarriage
- of your baby being born too early
- of having a stillborn baby
- of your baby dying of sudden infant death syndrome (also called SIDS or crib death)
- of your baby having a low birth weight (babies that are underweight at birth have a higher risk for infections and other health problems)

The good news is that by quitting, you can help your baby have a healthy start in life.

Is it okay to smoke after my baby is born?

Exposure to tobacco smoke puts both you and your child at a greater risk for health problems. If you smoke around your baby, your child will be exposed to environmental tobacco smoke (also called second-hand smoke or passive smoking). Environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) is made up of the smoke that is exhaled by the smoker and the smoke that comes from the burning end of the cigarette. There are 4,000 chemicals in ETS, and 50 of them are known to cause cancer.

Environmental tobacco smoke is especially harmful to babies because their lungs are still growing and developing. Small children who live with smokers have an increased risk of developing diseases such as pneumonia, bronchitis,

and middle ear disease. They are also more likely to have problems with coughs, colds and throat infections.

Can I use the nicotine patch or gum while I'm pregnant?

Two forms of Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) are licensed as over-the-counter medication in Canada: nicotine chewing gum and the nicotine patch. Both the chewing gum and the patch contain nicotine. Nicotine replacement therapies are designed to break the smoking cycle, cut exposure to cancer-causing chemicals (carcinogens) in cigarettes, and ease withdrawal. Talk to your doctor if you are thinking about using the nicotine patch or gum.

What if I'm already pregnant? Is it too late to quit?

It is never too late to quit smoking during your pregnancy. If you quit during your pregnancy, you can reduce the risks of your baby having a low birth weight. Keep in mind that the earlier you quit, the better it will be for your health and your baby's health.

What if friends or family members smoke?

Other people's environmental tobacco smoke contains chemicals that can harm you and your baby. Explain to any family and friends who smoke that you and your baby need smoke-free air. If family members or other visitors to your home must smoke, ask them to smoke outside. If visiting with friends or family who smoke, meet at spaces in the community that are smoke-free.

IF YOUR PARTNER SMOKES, ask for your partner's support. If your partner is willing, ask your partner to quit smoking with you. Quitting can be easier if you support each other.

IF YOUR PARTNER WON'T QUIT, ask your partner to smoke outside in areas away from the intake vents, away from the children and away from you.

What if I know someone who is pregnant and trying to quit?

Smoking is a powerful physical and psychological addiction. Quitting can be very difficult. Smokers need compassion, support and understanding while they're struggling to become smoke-free. Here's what you can do.

ASK HER HOW YOU CAN HELP. Make yourself available as much as possible, especially during the first few days.

LISTEN. Don't preach or counsel, just listen. Be prepared for mood changes. Understand that irritability can be a normal (and temporary) part of the withdrawal process. Encourage your friend/family member to talk openly about her feelings.

LET HER KNOW about the services available. Counselling and group support increase the chances of quitting. For more information, confidential support and referral, call AADAC's toll-free Smoker's Help Line at 1-866-33AADAC (1-866-332-2322).

ENCOURAGE HER to talk to a doctor. Advice and counselling from a doctor or health professional doubles the success rate for quitting.

HELP HER TO AVOID SMOKE and smokers as much as possible. Engage her in healthy activities that are not associated with smoking, especially in the first few weeks. For example, try walking, swimming or yoga. Or take her to places where smoking is not allowed (theatres, libraries, department stores). Help her to

avoid places or situations where it would be all too easy to have “just one.”

OFFER PRACTICAL SUPPORT. Quitting can be a very stressful process. Offer to take the children for a few hours or to help with the housework.

DON'T EXPECT OVERNIGHT SUCCESS.

Many smokers do not become life-long non-smokers with their first quit attempt. Quitting is a process and may involve relapses. If your smoker has a slip-up, encourage her to try quitting again as soon as possible. Talk about what triggered the relapse and how she could deal with it differently the next time.

CELEBRATE HER SUCCESS. Help her mark significant milestones (e.g., three days, one week, one month). Take her out to dinner, send her flowers or book her for a massage.

Want to know more?

For more information, contact your local AADAC Area Office, or visit the AADAC Web site at www.aadac.com.