Air Pollution, Allergies, and Asthma – When Breathing during Pregnancy Is Difficult

The air we breathe matters and often we do not have control over what is in it. For many, the Spring season brings beautiful flowers and a most welcome warming of temperatures, as well as spending more time outside. It also marks the explosion of pollen, which can irritate both those with allergies and people with asthma. Being outside to engage in outdoor activities also means we are exposed to any air pollution that may be present.

Pregnancy is a sensitive time for both the parent and the developing baby. Preventing issues related to allergies, asthma and air pollution is important for a few reasons. If you do have issues with asthma and it affects your breathing, the amount of oxygen in your blood can drop; this can create problems for baby as you are their source of oxygen while pregnant. The baby may have trouble growing as much as they should or may be born at a low birth weight. This can put the baby at higher risk for several health issues.

There has been increasing research on the possible effects of air pollution on pregnancies. Some studies suggest that higher amounts of pollution in the air are related to babies being born too small or too early. Air pollution also can make asthma symptoms worse. There are some ways to lower the amount of air pollution you are exposed to, and this may be even more important for those that live near highways or high traffic areas, or near landfills. Some clear ideas from the American Pregnancy Association include:

- Buying an air purifier to use in your home
- Checking the air quality before planning outdoor activities to see if it is dangerous for groups sensitive to air pollution or pollen. Simply visit this website and enter your zip code: https://www.airnow.gov/
- Choosing to spend more time indoors when air quality is low
- Buying some plants to have in your home that are known to improve air quality. Some common household plants known to help with this include Peace Lilies, Snake plants, Philodendrons, Spider plants, or Rubber Trees

Other important things to consider are checking in with your healthcare provider about any types of medications you may use to treat your asthma or allergies. Quitting your medications as soon as you become pregnant is often not the best choice for you or baby and managing your symptoms is important for the reasons discussed above. MotherToBaby has a landing page on asthma that includes resources: https://mothertobaby.org/pregnancy-breastfeeding-exposures/asthma/ and one about allergies: https://mothertobaby.org/pregnancy-breastfeeding-exposures/allergies/ These pages have links to fact sheets on many medications that are used to treat symptoms related to both topics.

As you move through the Spring months into Summer, try to appreciate the seasons while also being aware of how air quality can affect your health. As the saying goes, when you are pregnant you are “breathing for two.” As a reminder, our fact sheets also have breastfeeding information near the bottom of them that you can check out. We also encourage you to remember air quality can affect young children as well – especially ones with asthma. Finding a healthcare provider you and your family can see routinely to manage asthma related issues is important in order to avoid emergency room visits.

Take a deep breath and remember, whatever your concerns are, experts at MotherToBaby will do our best to give you

useful information based on research, or to point you in the right direction if we are unable to help.

Questions? Call 866.626.6847 | Text 855.999.3525 | Email or Chat at MotherToBaby.org.

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