

Asthma

This sheet is about having asthma in a pregnancy or while breastfeeding. This information should not take the place of medical care and advice from your healthcare provider.

What is asthma?

Asthma refers to inflammation (swelling and tightening) in the airways of the lungs. When an asthma attack happens, it is difficult for air to pass through the lungs which leads to symptoms like wheezing, coughing, and trouble breathing. Asthma cannot be cured but is often managed with medication in inhalers for immediate symptom relief (when an attack happens) and/or with daily medication to help reduce inflammation (to prevent attacks).

Asthma is one of the most common chronic diseases among people of reproductive age. For some people asthma attacks may be triggered by things like breathing in cold air, cold/flu viruses, strenuous exercise, chemicals, smoke, and allergies. Avoiding triggers and having a good medical plan in place can reduce the number of asthma attacks. It is important to talk with your health care provider about the best way to treat asthma during pregnancy.

I have asthma. Can it make it harder for me to become pregnant?

Some studies have suggested that it may take longer for people with asthma to get pregnant, especially when asthma is not well controlled. Other studies have not shown that it is harder for people with asthma to get pregnant.

How will pregnancy affect my asthma?

It is not possible to predict how a person's asthma will act during pregnancy. For about one third of people, asthma symptoms will get better during pregnancy, another one third will have no change in asthma symptoms, and in one third of people asthma symptoms will get worse. It appears that the more severe the asthma is at the time of conception (when the baby is made), the more likely it is that the symptoms will get worse during pregnancy. Therefore, it is important that a person's asthma is well controlled with carefully chosen medications prior to getting pregnant.

Does having asthma increase the chance for miscarriage?

Miscarriage can occur in any pregnancy. One study suggested a small chance for miscarriage; however, this study did not look at other factors that can cause miscarriage. Most other studies have not shown an increased chance of miscarriage among people with asthma.

Does having asthma increase the chance of birth defects?

Every pregnancy starts with a 3-5% chance of having a birth defect. This is called the background risk. Some studies have suggested an increased chance for birth defects over the background risk, while others have not. In these studies, it is difficult to know if the birth defects found were due to the asthma, the medications needed to control the asthma, or from other factors. If a person who is pregnant has trouble breathing they will take in less oxygen. This could lead to a lower amount of oxygen getting to the baby. Low oxygen to the developing baby could cause problems in organ development. If there is a risk from asthma itself, it is expected to be very low. Most people who are pregnant with asthma have babies without birth defects.

Would having asthma cause pregnancy complications?

Asthma during pregnancy, if not well controlled, is associated with higher rates of pregnancy complications, such as problems with the placenta, hemorrhage (blood loss), preeclampsia (a serious pregnancy related condition), high blood pressure, preterm delivery (birth before week 37), higher rates of C-section, and low birth weight. However, if well-controlled, people with asthma during pregnancy are not expected to have a greater chance for pregnancy complications than people without asthma.

Does having asthma in pregnancy cause long-term problems?

It is not known if having asthma in pregnancy causes long-term problems for a child. Children of people with asthma may also have a higher chance of developing asthma. One study found that asthma during pregnancy might be

associated with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), however, results of these studies are mixed.

Can taking medication for asthma during pregnancy cause birth defects or other pregnancy complications?

Most asthma medications have not been shown to cause birth defects or other pregnancy complications. Talk with your healthcare provider before making any changes to how you take your medication(s) and contact MotherToBaby with questions about your specific medications. For a list of MotherToBaby fact sheets related to asthma please see: <https://mothertobaby.org/pregnancy-breastfeeding-exposures/asthma/>.

Can I breastfeed while I have asthma?

Having asthma does not seem to affect a person's ability to breastfeed.

Can I breastfeed while taking my medications for asthma?

Most asthma medications can be taken while breastfeeding. For more information about asthma medicine during breastfeeding, contact MotherToBaby with your specific medication(s). Be sure to talk to your health care provider about all or your breastfeeding questions.

If a male has asthma, can it make it harder to get a partner pregnant or increase the chance of birth defects?

There are no studies looking at if asthma causes fertility problems in fathers or sperm donors. Asthma or use of asthma medications by the father or the sperm donor does not increase the chance for birth defects. In general, exposures that fathers or sperm donors have are unlikely to increase the risks to a pregnancy. For more information, please see the MotherToBaby fact sheet Paternal Exposures and Pregnancy at <https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/paternal-exposures-pregnancy/>.

MotherToBaby is currently conducting a study looking at asthma and the medication used to treat asthma in pregnancy. If you are interested in taking part in this study, please call 1-877-311-8972 or sign up at <https://mothertobaby.org/join-study>.

Please click [here](#) for references.

Questions? Call 866.626.6847 | Text 855.999.3525 | Email or Chat at [MotherToBaby.org](https://mothertobaby.org).

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