Cigarette Smoke

This sheet talks about exposure to cigarette smoke in pregnancy and while breastfeeding. This information should not take the place of medical care and advice from your healthcare provider.

What is in cigarette smoke?

Cigarette smoke is made of gases and very tiny particles that are released when cigarettes are burned. It has over 4,000 compounds including nicotine, tar, arsenic, lead, and carbon monoxide. When you breathe the cigarette smoke into your lungs, the gases and particles get into your blood and organs. Some of these chemicals cross the placenta and lower the amount of oxygen and food available for a developing baby. Second-hand smoke is inhaling the cigarette smoke of another person that is smoking near you.

Can cigarette smoke make it harder for me to become pregnant?

Some studies have found that people who smoke cigarettes can have a harder time getting pregnant compared to people who do not smoke cigarettes. Problems with getting pregnant may be greater for people who smoke more than 10 cigarettes a day. A person’s ability to get pregnant can improve once they stop smoking.

Can cigarette smoke increase the chance for a miscarriage?

Miscarriage can occur in any pregnancy. The chance of miscarriage is higher people exposed to cigarette smoke. There may also be a higher chance of ectopic pregnancy, a serious complication where the developing embryo grows outside of the uterus.

Can cigarette smoke cause a birth defect?

Every pregnancy starts out with a 3-5% chance of having a birth defect. This is called the background risk. Some studies suggest that cigarette smoking during pregnancy may increase the chance of an oral cleft in the baby, especially if oral clefts run in the family. An oral cleft occurs when the lip or palate (roof of the mouth) does not fully close as it should during the baby’s development.

Can cigarette smoke cause other pregnancy complications?

Cigarette smoke is associated with a higher chance of preterm delivery (delivery before 37 weeks of pregnancy), placental problems, low birth weight, stillbirth and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

The more exposure to cigarette smoke that a person has during pregnancy, the greater the chance for preterm delivery and the earlier the baby may be born. A baby born too early has a higher chance for health problems and may need to stay in the hospital longer, possibly in an intensive care unit. Low birth weight can also make it harder for the baby to recover from serious health problems. Those who stop smoking early in pregnancy can lower their chance of having a baby with low birth weight.

Cigarette smoke is also linked to serious problems with the placenta (the organ that grows in the uterus during pregnancy). The placenta delivers food and oxygen to the developing baby. Placental problems can include placenta previa (placenta blocks the birth canal) and placental abruption (placenta breaks away from the uterine wall early). These conditions can cause vaginal bleeding and can be life threatening to the person who is pregnant and/or result in loss of the pregnancy.

A higher chance of asthma, bronchitis and respiratory infections during childhood has also been found in children exposed to cigarette smoke during pregnancy.

If I smoke cigarettes near the end of my pregnancy, could my baby have withdrawal after birth?

Withdrawal symptoms, such as irritability, increased muscle tone (stiff muscles) and muscle tremors have been seen in newborns exposed to cigarette smoking during the last weeks of their pregnancy. These symptoms are short-term and are treated as needed by the healthcare team. It is not known how often this may occur.

Can exposure to cigarette smoke during pregnancy affect my baby’s development after birth?
Several studies have found a link between cigarette smoke exposure in pregnancy and learning and behavior problems in the exposed children. For example, there is a possible association with a higher chance of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Some studies have also reported a higher chance for children to be overweight if exposed to cigarette smoke in pregnancy.

**I smoke only five cigarettes a day. Is this still a problem?**

The risk of many of the pregnancy complications linked with cigarette smoke depends on how many cigarettes a person smokes, or how much exposure to second hand smoke there is. The less you smoke / the less exposure to 2nd hand smoke then the less you and your baby are at risk of having problems. If you cannot stop smoking, reducing the number of cigarettes a day that you smoke will have benefits. However, even a few cigarettes a day lessens the amount of food and oxygen the baby gets. It is best to completely stop smoking as early in pregnancy as possible.

**I am 28 weeks pregnant and I have been smoking cigarettes for all of my pregnancy. Is it too late to quit?**

It is never too late to quit smoking. If you stop smoking, you stop the exposure to your pregnancy. Stopping at any time during pregnancy can help to improve the growth and development of your baby. Stopping will also help your newborn by not exposing them to second hand smoke after they are born which can also affect the health of children.

**Are there any resources or medical treatments available to help me to quit smoking?**

For free advice, support and referrals, please call the Smoker’s Quitline at 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669) from anywhere in the U.S. There are also online resources to help you quit smoking such as [www.tobacco-cessation.org/PDFs/NeedHelpBooklet.pdf](http://www.tobacco-cessation.org/PDFs/NeedHelpBooklet.pdf). If it does not seem possible to stop smoking without medical treatment, discuss your options with your healthcare provider.

**Can I smoke cigarettes when I am breastfeeding?**

The safest approach is to not smoke while breastfeeding and to avoid exposure to second hand smoke. Nicotine can get into breast milk and could affect your baby. Your baby may also be exposed to other unhealthy chemicals from cigarettes that could cross into the breast milk. Despite these risks, it is thought that the benefits of breastfeeding might outweigh the risks of cigarette smoking for most babies. If you cannot stop smoking completely, you should reduce the number you smoke as much as possible, and do not smoke in the house or when you are near the baby. Talk to your healthcare provider about your breastfeeding questions.

**I smoke cigarettes. Can it make it harder for me to get my partner pregnant or increase the chance of birth defects?**

Exposure to cigarette smoke might affect sperm, leading to lower sperm counts, as well as abnormal shape and movement of sperm. This might make it harder to get a partner pregnant. For general information, please see the MotherToBaby fact sheet Paternal Exposures at [https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/paternal-exposures-pregnancy/](https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/paternal-exposures-pregnancy/).

If your partner is already pregnant, it is recommended to stop smoking or at least not smoke around the person who is pregnant (including in their house or car) because exposure to second hand smoke exposure can cause pregnancy complications.

Please click here for references.