Multiple Sclerosis

This sheet is about having multiple sclerosis in pregnancy or while breastfeeding. This information is based on published research studies. It should not take the place of medical care and advice from your healthcare provider.

What is multiple sclerosis?

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a condition that affects the brain, spinal cord, and optic nerves and how they communicate with the rest of the body. Symptoms can include loss of balance, numbness, vision problems, muscle spasms, tingling, mood changes, memory problems, pain, fatigue, and/or paralysis. Symptoms can vary from person to person and might be temporary or long-lasting.

I have multiple sclerosis. What should I talk about with my healthcare team before I get pregnant?

It is important to talk to your healthcare team (including your obstetrician, rheumatologist, and neurologist) about plans for treating your condition before and during pregnancy, during delivery, and after delivery. If possible, talk with your healthcare team before getting pregnant. If your pregnancy is unplanned, contact your healthcare providers as soon as you find out you are pregnant.

Things to talk about with your healthcare team include:

- Ways to monitor your pregnancy and your disease symptoms
- Any medications you should take during pregnancy
- Getting any necessary vaccines before and during pregnancy. Many vaccines can be given in pregnancy. For more information, please see the MotherToBaby fact sheet on vaccines at https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/vaccines-pregnancy/.
- Any other questions or concerns you have

I have multiple sclerosis. Can it make it harder for me to get pregnant?

Two studies reported lower rates of fertility (ability to get pregnant) in women with multiple sclerosis compared to those in the general population. Some women with multiple sclerosis might experience sexual dysfunction, such as a decreased desire to have sex or increased vaginal dryness. These symptoms might make it harder to get pregnant.

Does having multiple sclerosis increase the chance of miscarriage?

Miscarriage is common and can occur in any pregnancy for many different reasons. One study found that the rate of miscarriage among women with multiple sclerosis is similar to the rates of miscarriage in the general population.

Does having multiple sclerosis increase the chance of birth defects?

Birth defects can happen in any pregnancy for different reasons. Out of all babies born each year, about 3 out of 100 (3%) will have a birth defect. We look at research studies to try to understand if an exposure, like multiple sclerosis, might increase the chance of birth defects in a pregnancy. Having multiple sclerosis is not expected to increase the chance of birth defects.

Does having multiple sclerosis increase the chance of other pregnancy-related problems?

Having multiple sclerosis has not been shown to increase the chance of pregnancy-related problems, such as pre-term delivery (birth before week 37). One study showed a small increased chance of low birth weight (weighing less than 5 pounds, 8 ounces [2500 grams] at birth). In rare cases, a woman with severe symptoms might need help during delivery if they are too weak to push through contractions.

Does having multiple sclerosis in pregnancy affect future behavior or learning for the child?

Information from two small studies suggests that having multiple sclerosis during pregnancy does not increase the

chance of long-term developmental problems for the child.

Breastfeeding while I have multiple sclerosis:

Women with multiple sclerosis can successfully breastfeed. The chance of relapse can increase after delivery, so talk with your healthcare provider about your multiple sclerosis and breastfeeding. For information on the use of specific medications while breastfeeding, please see our fact sheets at https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets-parent/ or contact a MotherToBaby specialist. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about all your breastfeeding questions.

If a man has multiple sclerosis, can it affect fertility or increase the chance of birth defects?

For some men with multiple sclerosis, issues such as sexual dysfunction or lower quality of sperm can make it harder to conceive a pregnancy. In general, exposures that fathers or sperm donors have are unlikely to increase risks to a pregnancy. For more information, please see the MotherToBaby fact sheet Paternal Exposures at https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/paternal-exposures-pregnancy/.

MotherToBaby is currently conducting a study looking at multiple sclerosis and the medications used to treat multiple sclerosis 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.

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