



Smoking and your baby



Quitting smoking when you are pregnant will not only make you feel better but will give your baby a great start to life.

Health effects of smoking

Smoking causes cancer. If you smoke you have an increased risk of developing a range of cancers including cancer of the lung, mouth, throat, vulva, cervix and many others.

Smoking is also linked to other serious and life-threatening diseases such as cardiovascular disease, emphysema, and bronchitis.

If you smoke when you are pregnant, toxic chemicals from cigarettes are absorbed into your blood stream and passed on to your baby through the umbilical cord. Tobacco smoke contains over 7000 chemicals which can harm you and your baby.

Smoking during pregnancy causes many complications including:

- A higher risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)
- An increased risk of miscarriage
- A higher likelihood of having a low-birth-weight baby. Low birth weight babies are vulnerable to health problems in infancy and early childhood
- An increased risk of premature birth. Premature babies are susceptible to infection and breathing difficulties
- A higher risk of complications during childbirth
- A higher likelihood your child will have problems with lung development and function
- An increased chance of perinatal death (the baby dying at birth or shortly after).

Breastfeeding

If you are breastfeeding, you should consider quitting smoking as soon as possible. Breast milk contains a wide range of essential nutrients for your baby. Australian Dietary Guidelines recommend that infants are exclusively breastfed for around the first six months of life.

Continuing to smoke while you breastfeed transfers nicotine and other toxic chemicals from tobacco to your baby through your breastmilk.

Nicotine alters the flavour of breast milk and may cause your baby to struggle or refuse the breast. Women who smoke also tend to produce less milk and wean their babies earlier than non-smokers.

If you are unable to quit, you can minimise nicotine exposure to your baby by smoking straight after breastfeeding, rather than before or while feeding your baby.

It is recommended that you go outdoors away from your baby to smoke to protect your baby from second-hand smoke exposure.

Making your home totally smoke-free will reduce your child's exposure to the dangers of tobacco smoke.



Dispelling common myths on smoking and pregnancy

MYTH:

There's nothing wrong with having a low-birth-weight baby – it just means a quicker and easier birth.

Having a low-birth-weight baby does not make things easier for you or your baby during birth.

A smaller baby is more likely to become distressed, leading to a more complicated delivery.

Labour with a low-birth-weight baby is not easier or shorter than labour with an average birth weight baby.

MYTH:

Smoking relaxes me and being relaxed is better for my baby.

Smoking may calm you down, but it also speeds up your heart rate, increases your blood pressure and depresses your nervous system.

The feeling of relaxation experienced by many smokers is due to the nicotine in tobacco alleviating nicotine withdrawals.

Smoking also reduces the amount of oxygen available to your baby.

MYTH:

I'm already three months pregnant. There is no point in stopping now the damage is done.

Quitting at any stage during your pregnancy will reduce the harmful effects of smoking on your baby. If you quit now, your risk of having a low-birth-weight baby will be similar to that of a non-smoker.

There are other advantages to quitting, such as financial advantages. Planning for the arrival of your new baby can be an expensive process and every dollar will count.

MYTH:

Cutting down during pregnancy is good enough.

Every little bit you cut down helps, but even a few cigarettes a day means hundreds if not thousands of harmful chemicals will be in your growing baby's food supply and will reduce your own health when you need it most. There is no safe level of smoking.

MYTH:

If I stop smoking I'll put on too much weight.

During pregnancy you will need more energy and nutrition to cope with the needs of your growing baby and to maintain your own health.

Eating a balanced diet and being active can help you stay within a healthy weight range. If you feel weight gain is a problem, discuss this with your health professional.