

SMOKING AND PREGNANCY

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The number of people who smoke is decreasing in the general population due to the increased awareness and public knowledge about the dangers and ill effects of smoking. The American Lung Association states that more men are quitting than women. Among women, young and adolescent; the rates of quitting have not changed much. This is a worrisome trend because smoking among women affects not only their own health but also significantly adversely affects the health of a developing fetus during pregnancy. Half of all pregnancies are unplanned and if a woman continues to smoke during pregnancy, the adverse effects are magnified.

The following are some facts about smoking as relates to pregnancy published in the report 'Women and Smoking' from the Surgeon General of the United States of America (2001)

- Women smokers experience difficulty in becoming pregnant and may take longer time to conceive i.e. they need to keep on trying for longer to achieve a pregnancy, whether they have been pregnant before or have never been pregnant before
- The risk of spontaneous abortion (miscarriage) is higher among smokers.
- The risk of pregnancy in the fallopian tube (ectopic pregnancy) are higher among smokers
- If a woman is pregnant, she has higher chance of experiencing one of the devastating complications of pregnancy which may lead to the death of her baby and put her own life in jeopardy-such as
 - abruptio placenta (separation of the placenta from the wall of the uterus)
 - premature rupture of the membranes so the fluid around the fetus (amniotic fluid) drains away which may interfere with the development of the baby's lungs or interfere with the umbilical cord carrying oxygenated blood to the baby
 - preterm delivery, which is one of the leading causes of infant mortality (death) and morbidity (complications from early birth)
 - Low birth weight baby (intrauterine growth restriction)
 - Babies of mothers who smoke are more liable to die from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).
 - The risks of stillbirth (baby dead at birth) and neonatal deaths are higher

Despite all this information that is well known, it is estimated that 12 to 22% of pregnant continue to smoke through their pregnancies.

If all pregnant stopped smoking during pregnancy then, there could be a 10% reduction in all infant deaths and a 12% reduction in deaths from conditions that occur in and around pregnancy. Women who do stop smoking when they plan a pregnancy or those who quit as soon as they know they are pregnant, do reduce the risk of all the complications that happen during a pregnancy. Women find it easier and are more motivated to smoke during the time they are pregnant because in the early weeks of pregnancy cigarettes taste bad and the desire to smoke may decrease. Also women are motivated because they are doing it 'for the baby'. Many women who quit during pregnancy do not ever start smoking again.

If you have decided to stop smoking then here are some suggestions

- tell all your friends and family that you intend to quit and seek their support
- ask your doctor to help you quit
- make a list of all the reasons for which you want to quit
- set a date to quit and let all your friends and relatives know that date and seek their support
- save all the money you would have spent on buying cigarettes and reward yourself with something that you have always wanted
- find a companion to quit with you
- read all the material you can about quitting

If you have any questions about quitting ask your doctor. He or she would be able to provide you with all the assistance, support and follow-up that you would need to quit smoking.