

# Myths and Facts on Smoking & Pregnancy

## **"Smoking in pregnancy isn't that harmful"**

Stopping smoking during your pregnancy is the single most important step you can take to benefit your health and your baby's health.

When you smoke you breathe in over 4,000 chemicals from the cigarette. Every time you have a cigarette the smoke goes from your lungs into your bloodstream. Within moments these toxins are passing into your baby's blood supply through the placenta and umbilical cord. This restricts the essential oxygen supply to your baby that s/he need to grow and develop. His/her tiny heart has to beat harder every time you smoke.

The potential risks of smoking in pregnancy include:

- Miscarriage
- Birth defects
- Having the baby early
- Low birth weight (this can add to the risk of still birth and results in your baby being weaker and more susceptible to disease)

If you carry on smoking after your pregnancy, or your baby is exposed to secondhand smoke after birth, there is an increased risk of:

- Breathing problems
- Cot death
- Allergies

## **"I didn't know I was pregnant. Is it too late to stop?"**

It's never too late to stop smoking. The risks of smoking to your unborn baby return to normal if you stop smoking before the 14<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy.

Smoking during the last 4 to 5 months has particularly harmful effects on your baby's growth and health, so it's still worth stopping even if you have progressed beyond the first few weeks of pregnancy.

Harmful chemicals in cigarettes, like carbon monoxide, pass into your circulation and in turn reduce the oxygen supply to your baby. This means when you stop smoking, your baby will benefit immediately and the oxygen supply will quickly return to normal.

**Please turn over...**

## **“Can I use nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) in pregnancy?”**

Yes you can. NRT is licensed for use in pregnancy. It's available free on prescription in pregnancy and comes in 7 forms: patches, gum, inhalator, lozenges, nasal spray, mouth spray and microtabs, so there is something to suit everyone.

The nicotine in NRT is less harmful than exposure to the many chemicals in cigarettes, so if it helps you quit it's a much better option than smoking.

You are up to four times more likely to stop successfully if you use the NHS Stop Smoking Services and nicotine replacement products.

## **“My mum smoked and I'm fine. What's the problem?”**

Our knowledge and awareness of the dangers of smoking has increased dramatically over the years. Help and support to stop smoking was not available in the same way it is today.

As every pregnancy is different, it's important that you understand what we know about smoking during pregnancy, and use this information to make your own mind up about quitting.

Smoking affects babies in different ways. The harm done can depend on when you smoke during pregnancy, how many you smoke and how you smoke.

## **“Isn't the stress of quitting worse for my baby?”**

Smoking is far more damaging than any stress that comes from quitting. Non-smokers generally have lower stress levels and stopping smoking during pregnancy should therefore reduce your stress levels.

Stopping smoking will also benefit the pregnancy outcome greatly, benefiting both you and the baby.

## **“My partner smokes, do they have to quit too?”**

Regular exposure to secondhand smoke results in low birth weight, an increased risk of miscarriage, pre-term labour, attention deficit disorder.

Babies exposed to secondhand smoke can also develop asthma, wheezing and even suffer from cot death.

If your partner smokes, you will find it more difficult to stop smoking successfully.

Children of smokers are 3 times more likely to grow up to be smokers themselves.