



Smoking During Pregnancy

KEY POINTS

- Smoking during pregnancy can cause problems for your baby, like premature birth.
- If you're pregnant, don't smoke and stay away from secondhand and thirdhand smoke.
- If you need help to quit smoking, tell your health care provider.

Why is smoking during pregnancy harmful?

Smoking during pregnancy is bad for you and your baby. Quitting smoking, even if you're already pregnant, can make a big difference in your baby's life. Smoking harms nearly every organ in the body and can cause serious health conditions, including cancer, heart disease, stroke, gum disease and eye diseases that can lead to blindness.

How can smoking affect your pregnancy?

If you smoke during pregnancy, you're more likely than nonsmokers to have:

- [Preterm labor](#). This is labor that starts too early, before 37 weeks of pregnancy. Preterm labor can lead to [premature birth](#).
- [Ectopic pregnancy](#). This is when a fertilized egg implants itself outside of the uterus (womb) and begins to grow. An ectopic pregnancy cannot result in the birth of a baby. It can cause serious, dangerous problems for the pregnant woman.
- [Bleeding from the vagina](#)
- Problems with the placenta, like [placental abruption](#) and [placenta previa](#). The placenta grows in your uterus (womb) and supplies the baby with food and oxygen through the umbilical cord. Placental abruption is a serious condition in which the placenta separates from the wall of the uterus before birth. Placenta previa is when the placenta lies very low in the uterus and covers all or part of the cervix. The cervix is the opening to the uterus that sits at the top of the vagina.

How can smoking affect your baby?

Tobacco is a plant whose leaves are used to make cigarettes and cigars. Tobacco contains a drug called nicotine. Nicotine is what makes you become addicted to smoking. When you smoke during pregnancy, chemicals like nicotine, carbon monoxide and tar pass through the placenta and umbilical cord into your baby's bloodstream.

These chemicals are harmful to your baby. They can lessen the amount of oxygen that your baby gets. This can slow your baby's growth before birth and can damage your baby's heart, lungs and brain.

If you smoke during pregnancy, your baby is more likely to:

- Be born prematurely. This means your baby is born too early, before 37 weeks of pregnancy. [Premature babies](#) are more likely than babies born on time to have health problems.
- Have [birth defects](#), including birth defects in a baby's mouth called [cleft lip or cleft palate](#). Birth defects are health conditions that are present at birth. They change the shape or function of one or more parts of the body. They can cause problems in overall health, in how the body develops or in how the body works.
- Have [low birthweight](#). This means your baby is born weighing less than 5 pounds, 8 ounces.
- Die before birth. If you smoke during pregnancy, you're more likely to have a [miscarriage](#) or a [stillbirth](#). Miscarriage is when a baby dies in the womb before 20 weeks of pregnancy. Stillbirth is when a baby dies in the womb after 20 weeks of pregnancy.
- Die of [sudden infant death syndrome](#) (also called SIDS). This is the unexplained death of a baby younger than 1 year old.

What is secondhand smoke?

Secondhand smoke is smoke you breathe in from someone else's cigarette, cigar or pipe. Being around secondhand smoke during pregnancy can cause your baby to be born with low birthweight.

Secondhand smoke also is dangerous to your baby after birth. Babies who are around secondhand smoke are more likely than babies who aren't to have health problems, like pneumonia, ear infections and breathing problems, like asthma, bronchitis and lung problems. They're also more likely to die of SIDS.

What is thirdhand smoke?

Thirdhand smoke is what's left behind from cigarette, cigar and pipe smoke. It can include lead, arsenic and carbon monoxide. It's what you smell on things like clothes, furniture, carpet, walls and hair that's been in or around smoke. Thirdhand smoke is why opening a window or smoking in another room isn't enough to protect others when you smoke.

If you're pregnant or a new mom, stay away from thirdhand smoke. Babies who breathe in thirdhand smoke may have serious health problems, like asthma and other breathing problems, learning problems and cancer.

Is it safe to use e-cigarettes during pregnancy?

Electronic cigarettes (also called e-cigarettes or e-cigs) look like regular cigarettes. But instead of lighting them, they run on batteries. E-cigarettes contain liquid that includes nicotine, flavors (like cherry or bubble gum) and other chemicals. When you use an e-cigarette, you puff on a mouthpiece to heat up the liquid and create a mist (also called vapor) that you inhale. Using an e-cigarette is called vaping.

More research is needed to better understand how e-cigarettes may affect women and babies during pregnancy. Some studies show that e-cigarette vapor may contain some of the harmful chemicals that are found in regular cigarettes. Flavors and other chemicals used in e-cigarettes also may be harmful to a developing baby. If you're pregnant and using e-cigarettes or thinking about using them, talk to your health care provider.

Just like regular cigarettes, you can become addicted to e-cigarettes. If you drink, sniff or touch the liquid in e-cigarettes, it can cause nicotine poisoning. Signs or symptoms of nicotine poison include feeling weak, having breathing problems, nausea (feeling sick to your stomach) and vomiting. Nicotine poisoning can be deadly. Liquid nicotine in e-cigarettes comes in different flavors and is sold in small tubes that may be bright and colorful. This may make e-cigarettes seem fun and appealing, especially to children.

Can you just cut down on smoking? Or do you have to quit?

If you smoke, you may think that light or mild cigarettes are safer choices during pregnancy. This is not true. Or you may want to cut down rather than quit smoking altogether. It's true that the less you smoke, the better for your baby. But quitting is best.

The sooner you quit smoking during pregnancy, the healthier you and your baby can be. It's best to quit smoking before getting pregnant. But quitting any time during pregnancy can have a positive effect on your baby's life.

Besides, when you quit smoking, you never again have to go outside and look for a place to smoke. You also may have:

- Cleaner teeth
- Fresher breath
- Fewer stains on your fingers
- Fewer skin wrinkles
- A better sense of smell and taste
- More strength and energy to be more active

What are some tips to help you quit smoking?

Try these tips to help you quit smoking:

- Write down your reasons for quitting. Look at the list when you think about smoking.
- Choose a quit day. On this day, throw away all your cigarettes or cigars, lighters and ashtrays.
- Ask your partner or a friend to help you quit. Call that person when you feel like smoking. Stay away from places, activities or people that make you feel like smoking.
- Keep yourself busy. Go for a walk to help keep your mind off smoking. Use a small stress ball or try some needlework to keep your hands busy. Snack on veggies or chew gum to keep something in your mouth.
- Drink lots of water.
- Ask your health care provider about things to help you quit, like patches, gum, nasal spray and medicines. Don't start using these without your health care provider's OK, especially if you're pregnant.
- Look for programs in your community or where you work that can help you stop smoking. These are called smoking cessation programs. Ask your health care provider about programs in your area. Ask your employer to see what services are covered by health insurance.
- Don't feel badly if you can't quit right away. Keep trying! You're doing what's best for you and your baby.

More information

- smokefree.gov (1-800-Quit-Now)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](http://www.cdc.gov)
- [CDC tips for quitting smoking](#)
- [Amanda's story: Smoking during pregnancy and premature birth](#)

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