Pregnancy, Smoking During

Smoking during pregnancy is very unhealthy for both the mother and the developing child. Cigarette smoke contains more than 2,500 chemicals. It is not known for certain which of these chemicals are harmful to the developing baby. However, both nicotine and carbon monoxide play a role in causing health problems in pregnancy. Nicotine (the addictive drug in cigarettes), carbon monoxide, and many other poisons you inhale from a cigarette are carried through your bloodstream and go directly to your baby.

EFFECTS ON THE FETUS WHEN SMOKING DURING PREGNANY:

- Decrease in blood flow and oxygen to the uterus, placenta, and your baby in the womb (*fetus*).
- Increased heart rate of the fetus.
- Slowing of your baby's growth in the uterus.
- Double the rate of placental problems, including *placenta previa* (low-lying placenta that covers part or all of the uterus opening) and *placental abruption* (the placenta peels away, partially or almost fully, from the uterine wall before delivery).
- Increased risk of tubal pregnancy (*outside the uterus*).
- Premature tearing of membranes, causing the sac that holds the baby to break too early, resulting in premature birth and increased health risks to the baby.
- Increased risk of birth defects, including heart defects.

BABIES BORN TO WOMEN WHO SMOKE DURING PREGNANCY:

- Are 30% more likely to be born prematurely.
- Are twice as likely to have a low birth weight (less than 2500 grams or 5.5 pounds), increasing their risk for illness or death.
- Premature and low birthweight babies have an increased risk of serious health problems as a newborn, of chronic or lifelong disabilities (cerebral palsy, mental retardation, learning problems), and of death.
- Are 1.4 to 3.0 times more likely to die of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).
- Have higher rates of miscarriage and still birth.
- Have more lung and breathing (*respiratory*) problems.

The more a pregnant woman smokes, the greater her risk of having a low birthweight baby. However, if a woman stops smoking by the end of her second trimester of pregnancy, she is no more likely to have a low birthweight baby than a woman who never smoked.

Smoking during pregnancy has long-term effects on children's behavior and health. The following trends are seen in children of smoking mothers:

- Greater risk for drug abuse, behavior and conduct disorders.
- Adolescent drug abuse in girls is over 5 times higher, if their mothers smoked more than 10 cigarettes a day while pregnant.
- Boys younger than 13 are at a greater risk for conduct disorder, if their mothers smoked more than 10 cigarettes a day while pregnant.
- Mothers who smoke during pregnancy increase the risk for adolescent smoking in their daughters.
- Increased risk for asthma, colic and childhood obesity.

SMOKING AND BREASTFEEDING

- Smoking can cause problems if the mother breastfeeds her baby. Nicotine gets passed to the baby through her breastmilk. This can cause nausea, colic, cramping and diarrhea in the baby.
- Smoking may reduce milk supply and interfere with the let-down response.
- Even formula-fed infants of mothers who smoke have nicotine and cotinine (nicotine by-product) in their urine.

SOURCES OF HELP TO STOP SMOKING DURING PREGNANCY:

- Counseling.
- Psychological treatment.
- Acupuncture.
- Hypnosis.
- Medicines that are safe to take during pregnancy.

Nicotine supplements have not been studied enough and should be considered only if all other methods have failed. The benefits of not smoking start days after quitting. You and your baby's heartbeat will return to normal. Your baby will be less likely to develop breathing problems. You may have symptoms of withdrawal because your body is used to nicotine. You may crave cigarettes, be irritable, feel hungry, cough often, get headaches, or have difficulty concentrating. These withdrawal symptoms are only temporary. They are strongest when you first quit, but will go away within 10-14 days.

SUMMARY

- Smoking has bad long-term effects on the developing baby, and on your ability to give birth with a minimum of health risks to you and your baby. **QUIT SMOKING IMMEDIATELY**.
- Pregnancy is a great time to quit smoking. With new tools, it has become much easier to quit successfully and for good.

Smoking around your baby after delivery will contribute to:

- Increased upper respiratory infections.
- Middle ear infections.
- Medical problems.
- Allergies.

Much of this information is courtesy of The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA).

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