

Tobacco smoke contains toxic chemicals

The umbilical cord is your baby's lifeline. When you smoke, toxic chemicals are absorbed into your bloodstream and passed onto your baby through the umbilical cord. Tobacco smoke contains more than 4,000 toxic chemicals, which may harm you and your baby.

Two of these toxic chemicals are carbon monoxide and nicotine. Carbon monoxide replaces the oxygen in your blood and reduces the amount of oxygen available to your baby through the umbilical cord. Nicotine increases your heart rate and your baby's heart rate. Nicotine also causes your blood vessels to narrow, which reduces the flow of blood through the umbilical cord. It also reduces your baby's ability to exercise their chest muscles to prepare for breathing after birth.

If you are a non-smoker, being exposed to tobacco smoke by your partner, family and friends is also dangerous. Breathing in the smoke from someone else's cigarette is called 'passive smoking' and exposes you and your baby to toxic chemicals. Your womb does not protect your unborn baby from the harmful effects of tobacco smoke.

Making your home a smokefree zone will help you to quit and will reduce your child's exposure to the dangers of tobacco smoke. If your partner smokes, encourage them to consider quitting too.

How to quit

To improve your chance of quitting and staying stopped, it is a good idea to plan ahead. You may find these tips useful:

- **Get support:** Call Quitline 13 QUIT (13 7848) for free information, practical assistance and support. Quitline's trained counsellors are available seven days a week to help you get through the process of quitting. Many Quitline staff are women and you can speak with a female counsellor if you prefer.
- **Talk to your health professional:** Discuss quitting smoking with a general practitioner, midwife, pharmacist or community health worker and plan your quitting strategy together. Different products are available to help you quit smoking, your general practitioner will be able to advise you on which product you should use.
- **When the urge to smoke strikes, remember the '4Ds':**
 - Delay:** Delay for at least five minutes and the urge will pass.
 - Deep breathe:** Breathe slowly and deeply.
 - Drink water:** Take 'time out' and sip water slowly.
 - Do something else:** Ring a friend or go for a walk.



Further information:

www.quitnow.info.au • www.cancerqld.org.au
www.health.qld.gov.au/quitsmoking
Cancer Council Helpline 13 11 20

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Smoking and pregnancy



Making healthy choices such as quitting smoking, eating healthy foods and avoiding alcohol 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 is the major cause of lung cancer and causes cancers of the cervix, mouth, throat, bladder, pancreas, kidneys and stomach. It has also been suggested that smoking could cause cancer of the uterus, colon and liver. Smoking is also a major cause of heart disease and lung disease.

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 more vulnerable to health problems in infancy and early childhood, compared to average birth weight babies.
- An increased risk of premature labour. Premature babies are susceptible to infection and breathing difficulties because their internal organs are not properly developed.
- A higher risk of complications during childbirth.
- A higher likelihood of your child experiencing problems with lung development and function.
- An increased chance of perinatal death (the baby dying at or shortly after birth).

Breastfeeding

If you continue to smoke while you breastfeed, nicotine and the other toxic chemicals from tobacco are passed onto your baby through your breastmilk. Although this is not good for your baby, it is better than not breastfeeding at all as breastmilk contains a wide range of essential nutrients for your baby.

Nicotine alters the flavour of breastmilk, and as a result, your baby may struggle at the breast or even refuse the breast. Your ability to breastfeed is also affected by smoking. Women who smoke tend to produce less milk and wean their babies earlier than non-smokers.

If you choose to bottle feed because you are smoking, you will be putting your baby at risk of possible infection and when you smoke your baby will be passive smoking. If you are having difficulty quitting, consider the damage every cigarette is causing and decide whether smoking is worth the risk to you or your child. Try not to smoke before or during feeds and go outdoors to smoke whenever possible.

Passive smoking

Young children are very susceptible to the health effects of tobacco smoke because they have smaller and more delicate lungs than adults and their immune systems are still developing. Children with parents who smoke have been found to record nicotine levels the same as if they were actually smoking up to 150 cigarettes per year. This means they are also breathing in many of the same toxic chemicals.

Babies and children exposed to tobacco smoke are at serious risk of:

- Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).
- Bronchitis, pneumonia and other lung or airway infections.
- Respiratory symptoms such as coughing and wheezing.
- Middle ear disease ('glue ear').

Common fears and fallacies

“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 no easier or shorter than labour with an average birth weight baby.

“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. Every time you inhale tobacco smoke the carbon monoxide level in your bloodstream increases. This replaces oxygen in your blood, reducing the amount of oxygen available to your baby. This is definitely not better for your baby. The feeling of relaxation experienced by many smokers is due to the nicotine in tobacco alleviating nicotine withdrawals and because of the actual time taken to have a cigarette.

“I’m already three months pregnant. What’s the point of 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.

“Cutting down during pregnancy is good enough.”

Every little bit you cut down helps, but even a few cigarettes a day means many 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. Planning to quit as early as you can means a better start to life for your baby.

“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. Weight gain may occur when you quit smoking because you are no longer absorbing nicotine into your bloodstream. Nicotine suppresses appetite and you may find you eat more after you quit. Eating a balanced diet is one of the best ways to stay within a healthy weight range. Being active will also help your body adjust to being without cigarettes and to pregnancy. Not everyone gains weight when they quit smoking but if you feel weight gain is a problem, discuss this with your health professional.