

for mums-to-be

NHS

**baby on  
the way,  
quit today**

what you need to  
know about smoking  
and pregnancy



 SMOKEFREE

start  
**4** life  
A good start for a healthier life

# quitting smoking is the best thing you can do for your baby

We know that it can be difficult to quit smoking. But we also know that you want to give your baby the best possible start in life.

Quitting smoking is the most important thing you can do to improve your baby's health, growth and development. But there are many old wives' tales about smoking during pregnancy that actually stop mums-to-be from quitting. So we thought we should share the facts you need to know.

In this booklet you'll find answers to the most commonly asked questions. Each answer gives you the facts about smoking and your baby.

No matter what stage you're at in your pregnancy, it's never too late to stop smoking. And you're up to four times more likely to quit successfully with NHS support. Once you've read this booklet, the best thing you can do is get in touch with us. We're here to help you, your partner and your baby.



## what does smoking do to my baby?



- When you smoke, you breathe in over 4,000 chemicals from the cigarette.
- The smoke goes from your lungs into your bloodstream.
- That blood flows to your placenta and umbilical cord – right into your baby's tiny body.
- This causes your baby to struggle for oxygen and their tiny heart to pump even harder.

It's difficult to imagine when you can't see your baby, but smoking when you're pregnant is like blowing smoke in your baby's face. When you smoke a cigarette the poisons from the cigarette smoke are passed on to your baby. Not only is this very distressing for your baby, but the exposure to these poisons can last up to **15 minutes** at a time. It's like putting your baby in a smoke-filled room for 15 minutes!

This happens for each and every cigarette you smoke, so cutting down on your smoking rather than quitting will still have a harmful effect on your baby's wellbeing. Your baby's tiny body is completely dependent on yours, so if you smoke throughout your pregnancy, your baby will go through nicotine withdrawal once it is born. This can make your baby stressed and irritable and it may be difficult to stop them crying. And smoking while you are pregnant increases the risks of your baby dying from cot death by at least 25%.



## q isn't the womb like a protective bubble for my baby?

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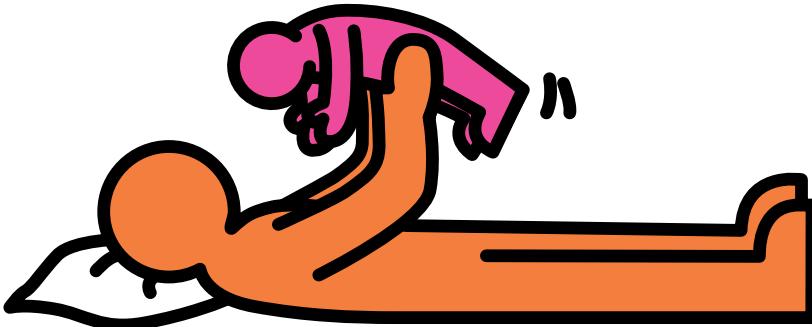
Your womb protects your baby from lots of things. But because your baby shares your bloodstream, it isn't protected from your cigarette smoke.

- Cigarettes contain over 4,000 chemicals, including carbon monoxide, hydrogen cyanide and arsenic.
- All those chemicals are passed on to your baby every time you smoke.
- Smoking is the main cause of low birth weight in babies, which can lead to miscarriage, premature birth, stillbirth, illness and cot death.

## how the chemicals from cigarettes get to your baby

When you smoke a cigarette, the smoke passes through your lungs into your bloodstream. That blood then moves around your body until it goes through the placenta and umbilical cord – right into your baby's tiny body. The placenta protects your baby from some things – but not from the poisons in cigarette smoke.

What makes it worse is that carbon monoxide in cigarettes also restricts the oxygen supply. So your baby gets less of the oxygen it needs to grow, and that can affect their development.





## q when i quit, isn't the stress worse for my baby?

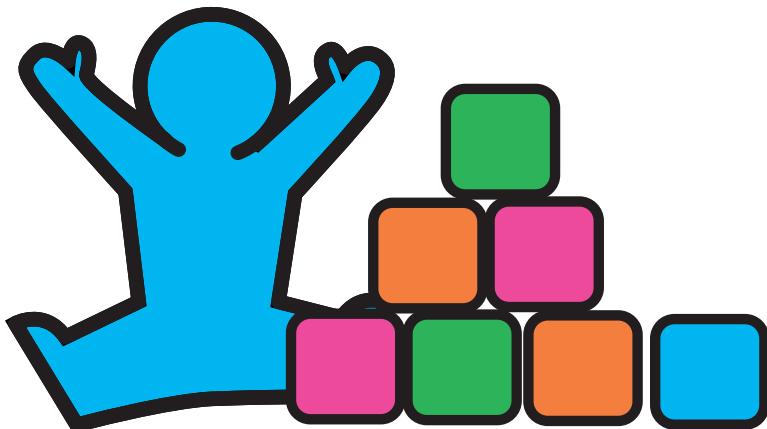
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- No. Smoking is far more damaging to your health and your baby's health than any stress that comes from quitting.
- It's the cravings between cigarettes that make you feel stressed and anxious, so when you smoke the cigarette you feel calmer. But you'll feel much less stressed once you quit and don't have cravings any more.

## stopping smoking can actually reduce your stress levels

You'll feel better and healthier when you quit. Plus you're more likely to have a healthy and natural birth, which is much better for you and your baby.

You might be feeling stressed from time to time and you might feel that smoking helps you cope. But non-smokers normally have lower stress levels. So stopping smoking while you're pregnant should bring your stress levels down.



## **q i didn't know i was pregnant. is it too late to stop smoking?**

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- It's never too late for you to stop smoking.
- Once you stop smoking, you and your baby will benefit immediately and the oxygen supply will quickly return to normal.
- Even if you've smoked during the first few months of your pregnancy, you should quit now as smoking has a particularly harmful effect on your baby's growth and development.
- And if you quit by the 15th week of your pregnancy, the risk of your baby being born prematurely or having a low birth weight is the same as that of a non-smoker.

### **why it's never too late to stop smoking**

The simple fact is that it's never too late to stop smoking.

Because the carbon monoxide in cigarettes restricts your baby's oxygen supply, every time you smoke it makes your baby's tiny heart beat harder. So once you stop smoking, you and your baby will feel the difference immediately.

If you smoke in the last five months of pregnancy it's even more harmful to your baby's growth and health. So it's still worth stopping even if you've smoked at the start of your pregnancy.



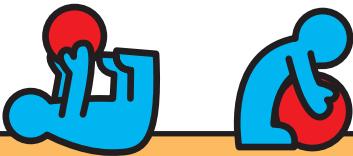
## **q my mum smoked and i'm fine. what's the problem?**

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- Smoking affects babies in different ways, so just because you're fine it doesn't mean your baby will be.

### **why you should quit**

Every year we learn more about the health risks of smoking in pregnancy. When our mums were pregnant, we knew a lot less about the risks. We now know much more about how smoking while you are pregnant damages your baby and affects their health, even after they are born. Smoking while you are pregnant can lead to miscarriage, premature birth, stillbirth, illness and cot death, so stopping smoking is the most important thing you can do to improve your baby's health.



## q my partner smokes, should they quit too?

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- Yes, they should. Regular exposure to secondhand smoke increases the risk of you having a miscarriage.
- If your partner smokes, you could find it much more difficult to quit successfully yourself.
- The children of smokers are three times more likely to grow up to be smokers themselves.

## how your partner's smoke can harm your baby

If your partner smokes it not only affects his health, but your health and your baby's health too.

You are more likely to suffer a miscarriage if your baby is regularly exposed to secondhand smoke during pregnancy.

There's also a bigger risk of premature birth, stillbirth, low birthweight, birth defects and problems that could affect your child for much longer – like allergies, asthma, wheezing, attention deficit disorder and even cot death.

We know you'd never want your baby to smoke. But the children of smokers are three times more likely to grow up to be smokers themselves. This means they could be three times more likely to develop a serious illness, disability, or die a premature death from smoking.

For more information on the free NHS support available to help your partner quit, visit [www.smokefree.nhs.uk](http://www.smokefree.nhs.uk)



## **q will a low birth weight baby make giving birth easier?**

- No. A low birth weight does not lead to an easier birth.
- It also adds to the risks of stillbirth and results in your baby being weaker and more susceptible to disease.

## **how a low birth weight can harm your baby**

Not only does a low birth weight not make the birth any easier, it actually increases the risk of harm to your baby.

Some people say that they want to carry on smoking so that they will have a smaller baby and an easier birth. It's true that continuing to smoke will make your baby smaller because it will have been starved of oxygen. But this doesn't mean that giving birth will be any easier.

A low birth weight adds to the risks of stillbirth, and makes your baby weaker and at greater risk of disease, with a higher risk of hearing loss, learning difficulties and sight problems, as well as cerebral palsy.

## **q can i use nicotine replacement therapy while i'm pregnant?**

- Ideally you should try to stop without using nicotine replacement therapy (NRT), but if you're finding it difficult there are several options which are safe to use in pregnancy.
- Remember, you're up to four times more likely to stop smoking successfully with NHS support.

## **how nicotine replacement therapy can help you quit successfully**

If it's going to help you quit, using NRT is a much better option than continuing smoking. The nicotine used in NRT is less harmful than the chemicals and poisons in cigarettes.

NRT for pregnant women is available in six forms: patches, gum, an inhalator, nasal spray, lozenges or microtabs. Don't worry if that sounds complicated. You can get advice and guidance on NRT from your midwife, health visitor, GP, pharmacist or a pregnancy stop smoking specialist.

And before using NRT you must have that conversation with an adviser. Only the experts can tell you exactly what medicines you should and shouldn't use during pregnancy, and they'll be happy to help.



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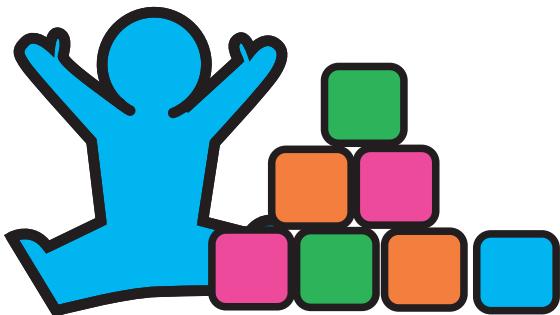
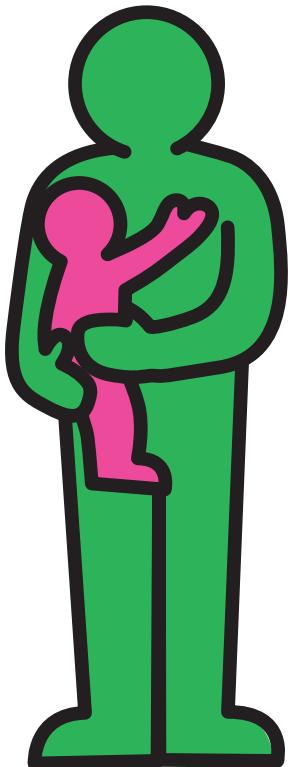
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**we're here to help you**

**Call: 0800 013 0553**

**Email: blmkccg.stopsmokingservice@nhs.net**

**Vist: [www.thestopsmokingservice.co.uk](http://www.thestopsmokingservice.co.uk)**



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