

Preterm Labour

Preterm (premature) labour is labour that starts before 37 weeks of pregnancy, and may lead to preterm birth. Preterm babies often have difficulty breathing, feeding, staying warm, and can be more prone to infections.

PRETERM LABOUR CAN HAPPEN TO ANYONE.

What causes preterm labour is not completely known, but there are specific things which place some women at greater risk for early delivery.

Women who:

- have had previous preterm labour or delivery
- are carrying more than one baby ie. Twins, triplets
- smoke
- are underweight and/or not getting enough healthy food
- have a great deal of stress in their lives
- have had repeated abortions, especially late abortions
- have had several miscarriages after 12 weeks gestation
- have a vaginal or bladder infection

Although it's not possible to prevent all preterm labours, a woman can reduce her chances of early labour by doing the following:

- See a doctor/midwife as early as possible in pregnancy
- Practice a healthy lifestyle early in pregnancy and throughout
- Follow Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating
- Take time out in the day to lie down and relax
- If a woman smokes, she should try to quit or at least cut back as much as possible
- If a woman feels as though things "aren't right", she should see her doctor/midwife

IMPORTANT SIGNS TO WATCH FOR IF YOU ARE PREGNANT

- Bad cramps or stomach pains that don't go away
- Bleeding, trickle or gush of fluid from your vagina
- Lower back pain/pressure, or change in lower backache
- A feeling that the baby is pushing down
- Contractions, or a change in their strength or number
- An increase in the amount of vaginal discharge
- Fever, chills, dizziness, vomiting or a bad headache
- Blurry vision or spots before your eyes
- Sudden or severe swelling of your feet, hands or face
- A significant change in your baby's movement

Go to the Hospital right away and contact your Doctor/Midwife if you have any of these symptoms!



Hazards

Until the 1960's, it was assumed that the placenta protected the fetus. Now we know that most drugs and other harmful substances cross the placenta freely. Any substance taken into mother's body by eating, drinking, breathing, or injecting is also taken into baby's body.

The following pages provide some basic information about hazards in pregnancy. For more information contact the Motherisk Clinic at 1-800-436-8477.

Help each other in making any changes that will support the health of your baby and family.

Smoking



The chemicals in tobacco smoke change the mother's blood so that baby receives less oxygen and food. Pregnancy is a good time to consider quitting smoking or at least cutting down.

Here are just some of the effects of smoking and second-hand smoke:

- Babies are usually small and are often born prematurely.
- More problems are likely to occur during labour and delivery.
- Newborn babies are at increased risk of sudden infant death syndrome (crib death).
- Infants are more likely to have respiratory infections (bronchitis, pneumonia), ear infections and asthma.
- Children may have learning disabilities.

It takes over three hours to remove 95% of the smoke of one cigarette from a room.

Nicotine substitutes such as nicotine patches, medication and gum should not be used during pregnancy.

There is no safe level of exposure to second-hand smoke. Ask friends and family to take it outside.

For further information on quitting, check out "Quitting" on page 20.

Alcohol

It is recommended that women who are pregnant do not drink any alcohol. **A safe amount is not known. We do know that the amount of alcohol, and stage of pregnancy at which the drinking occurred, influences the severity of damage to the unborn baby.**

Alcohol can cause:

- Miscarriage
- Learning disabilities
- Behavioural problems
- Stillbirth
- Heart problems

Family members and friends can help to set an example by not using drugs and alcohol.



Drugs

Prescription/Over-the-counter drugs*

*over-the-counter drugs are drugs you can buy without a prescription
eg. Tylenol, Aspirin, laxatives and antacids.

A woman should talk to her physician or pharmacist before taking any medication.

Prescription drugs may need to be changed and over-the-counter drugs are not always necessary. See the "Personal Comfort" section for other remedies.

Street Drugs (marijuana, heroine, crack, etc.)

Unborn babies who are exposed to street drugs are at risk for abnormalities and life-long problems (eg. cocaine increases risk of miscarriage, prematurity, neurological problems, respiratory problems). A baby may also become addicted to certain drugs taken during pregnancy.



Caffeine

eg. coffee, tea, colas, chocolate, many headache and cold medicines

Caffeine can cause fluid loss and over-stimulation which can negatively affect the baby.

Women who are planning to become pregnant, pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers should eliminate caffeine or limit the amount of caffeine to no more than 300mg. a day from all sources.

Common examples of caffeine sources include:

Coffee (8 oz.)

- drip 179mg.
- percolated 118mg.
- instant 76-106mg.
- decaffeinated 3mg.

Tea (8 oz.)

- average blend 43mg.
- Green 30mg.
- decaffeinated tea 0mg.

Soft Drinks (10 oz.)

- Cola beverages, regular/diet 39-50mg.
- Caffeine Free Colas trace
- Iced Tea (12 oz.) 22-36mg.

Chocolate:

- Chocolate Milk (8 oz.) 8mg.
- Hot Chocolate (8 oz.) 5mg.
- Chocolate Candy Bar (small) up to 17 mg.



Herbal Teas

At this time there is not enough scientific information about the safety of herbs and herbal products. Herbal teas generally considered safe, if taken in moderation (2 - 3 cups per day), are citrus peel, ginger, lemon balm, orange peel and rose hip. Teas such as Ginseng and Dong quai, which have drug-like effects, should never be used during pregnancy. Other alternatives to caffeine beverages are hot or cold water with lemon, hot milk, hot apple juice or ovaltine.

Chemical Hazards

Chemical hazards are found in common household and hobby supplies and some work environments. Paints, cleaning agents, insecticides, fertilizers and weed killers can/or may contain lead and other toxins.

Check labels and find out before you use the product if it is safe during pregnancy. Follow all recommended precautions at work and home. For more information on hazards, call Motherisk at The Hospital For Sick Children 1-416-813-6780.



Toxoplasmosis

Toxoplasmosis is an infection caused by a parasite found in cat or sheep feces, raw or undercooked eggs and meat and vegetables grown in contaminated soil. Anyone who gets this infection becomes immune to future infection. The symptoms may be so mild an adult may be unaware of the infection. Toxoplasmosis during pregnancy can cause severe mental and physical problems for baby. Prevention: 1. Avoid bringing a new cat into your home. 2. Wash hands and cooking surfaces well after handling raw meats and vegetables. 3. Avoid eating raw or undercooked meat and raw eggs. 4. Wear gloves while gardening. 5. Wash hands after handling a cat. 6. Pregnant women should not empty the litter box. Have someone else empty the litter box and dispose of it in a garbage bag (not the garden). NOTE: Due to the fact that birthing fluids from sheep contain several infections including toxoplasmosis, pregnant women should not assist with lambing.



X-rays

A woman should inform her health care provider or dentist that she is pregnant before having an x-ray.

Direct radiation could cause birth defects, especially if the x-ray is taken during the first trimester. While the risk is slight, it is best to avoid x-rays during pregnancy.



Hot Tubs

Hot tubs, hot baths and saunas should be avoided throughout pregnancy. The high heat can cause a rise in mother's body temperature, causing birth defects, brain damage or even death of the baby.



Car Crash

The correct way for a pregnant woman to wear a seat belt is by wearing the lower belt snugly across the upper thigh and keeping the shoulder belt snug over the shoulder and across the chest.



Injury

To ensure baby is not harmed, a doctor or midwife should be seen if a woman falls or there is injury to the belly during pregnancy.

As baby grows bigger, a woman's balance may be affected. It is important to be careful when walking, especially if the ground is wet or slippery. Others can be helpful by reaching for things on high shelves.

Stress

Too much stress during pregnancy increases a woman's chances of having a premature birth and a low birth weight baby.

Relaxing, walking, listening to music, talking with friends/family, taking a bath, can all help relieve stress.

Avoid negative coping mechanisms like overeating, smoking, drinking alcohol or doing drugs.



Smoking & Pregnancy

... a time to change

Taking care of yourself is always important. You deserve a healthy body, one that you feel good about.

Many women chose to make changes that improve their health when they are pregnant or planning a pregnancy. Quitting smoking is a great place to start.

The benefits of quitting can last a lifetime, and will give your baby a healthier start in life.

To quit once and for all, you need to believe in your reasons for quitting. Imagine yourself as a non-smoker. Tell yourself that you are worth it.

Smoking Quiz: You & Your Baby

- Smoking causes lung cancer, emphysema, heart attack and stroke.
 True False
- Smoking may sometimes feel relaxing, but it actually adds stress to your body.
 True False
- During pregnancy, smoking decreases the amount of oxygen in the mother's blood which causes decreased oxygen to the unborn baby.
 True False
- Smoking increases your chance of miscarriage or complications during pregnancy such as premature delivery.
 True False
- Switching to light cigarettes is a good idea when trying to quit smoking.
 True False
- Nursing mothers who smoke can pass nicotine and other harmful chemicals to their babies in breast milk.
 True False
- Although the cause of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS or crib death) is not precisely known, recent studies show parental smoking as the number one risk factor.
 True False
- It is never too late to quit.
 True False
- Second-hand smoke contains more than 4000 chemicals and about 50 of them are known to cause cancer.
 True False
- Second-hand smoke won't cause harm to my baby after birth.
 True False

Answers

Adapted with permission from the Perth District Health Unit. This information was reproduced with permission from the Canadian Council for Tobacco Control.

- TRUE - Smoking is one of the leading causes of lung cancer, emphysema, heart attack and stroke. It is also the main cause of day-to-day health problems such as "smoker's cough", shortness of breath and bronchitis. Smoking also affects women when they want to get pregnant and when they are pregnant.
2. TRUE - Although smoking may sometimes feel relaxing, it actually adds stress to your body. It speeds up your heart and increases your baby's blood pressure. Smoking also increases your baby's heart rate. Giving up cigarettes will protect your baby's health and make your pregnancy and labour less stressful.
3. TRUE - Babies need a good supply of oxygen and food, which they get from their mother's blood. The chemicals in tobacco smoke make the mother's blood less able to carry oxygen. Because of this, babies of women who smoke get less food and oxygen. Babies of smokers are more likely to have lower birth weights. They are sometimes born too soon and get sick more often.
4. TRUE - Smoking increases your chance of miscarriage or complications during pregnancy, such as premature delivery. Women who smoke during pregnancy also have more problems in labour and delivery and double their risk of having a low birth weight baby. Low birth weight babies have a greater risk of health problems.
5. FALSE - Switching to light cigarettes is not the answer. In fact, smokers who switch to light cigarettes may change the way they smoke by smoking more or by inhaling deeper and, therefore, inhale the same amount of nicotine.
6. TRUE - Nursing mothers who smoke can pass nicotine and other harmful chemicals to their babies in breast milk. Some babies are made irritable by the nicotine. They are agitated and difficult to calm down.
7. TRUE - Although the cause of sudden infant death syndrome is not precisely known, recent studies show parental smoking as the number one risk factor.
8. TRUE - It is never too late to quit. While it is best to quit right away, quitting at any time during your pregnancy will still help you and your baby get a healthy new start in life. Each month of not smoking during pregnancy will improve both your health and your baby's health.
9. TRUE - Second-hand smoke is the smoke that drifts from the end of a burning cigarette, cigar or pipe. It contains more than 4000 chemicals.
10. FALSE - Second-hand smoke is more harmful to babies and young children because they breathe faster and have smaller airways. Children who live with smokers have an increased risk of many breathing problems, like bronchitis, and asthma, compared to children who live with non-smokers. They are also more likely to get ear infections, colds and throat infections.

Quiz

Is it Safe?

Choose either "T" or "F":

1. Cold medicine can be taken anytime throughout pregnancy.
 True False
2. Drinking alcohol can affect the unborn baby.
 True False
3. Second-hand cigarette smoke may harm unborn babies.
 True False
4. It's okay for a pregnant woman to drink as much coffee or cola as she likes.
 True False
5. It is safe for pregnant women to change cat litter.
 True False
6. It is essential to consult with a doctor/midwife about all medication, even medicine you can buy without a prescription.
 True False
7. Hot tubs are beneficial to use during pregnancy.
 True False
8. X-rays should be avoided if possible.
 True False

Answers

1. FALSE - Cold medicines usually contain many different kinds of drugs. Analgesics, caffeine and bronchodilators are a few. For this reason, it is best to avoid cold medicines. The best approach in fighting the "common cold" is to get lots of rest and drink fluids. If your cold persists, contact your physician.
2. TRUE - No one knows how much alcohol is safe for a pregnant woman to drink. Alcohol can seriously harm the baby.
3. TRUE - Cigarette smoke from mother, or second-hand smoke, can slow fetal growth by reducing placental blood flow. This lessens nutrient and oxygen supplies. The reduced oxygen can damage the baby's developing brain and reduced nutrients can produce an underweight baby.
4. FALSE - Recently, concern has increased that caffeine taken in large amounts may harm the baby. It is best to eliminate or restrict caffeine intake.
5. FALSE - Pregnant women should not change the cat litter. Cats can carry toxoplasmosis which can cause birth defects.
6. TRUE - The placenta was once thought to be a barrier that protected the fetus from all substances. It is now known that this is not true. In fact, the placenta lets almost everything the mother ingests, go to her unborn baby too. Substances which are fairly harmless to healthy adults can harm unborn babies. Any effects depend on the stage of growth the baby is in.
7. FALSE - Although hot tubs can be relaxing, avoid them during pregnancy. A rise in mother's body temperature may harm the baby's developing brain.
8. TRUE - X-rays expose your unborn baby to radiation. There is a small chance this radiation increases the risk of cancer.