Tobacco and Nicotine (commercial*) Before, During, and After Pregnancy

Cigarettes, cigars, vape liquid/juice, pouches, snuff

FAST FACTS

- Using tobacco and/or nicotine can make it harder to get pregnant, increase pregnancy risks, and harm a baby's growth, development and long-term health.
- Nicotine is an addictive substance found in tobacco, most vape liquids and nicotine pouches, and it can lead to dependence, making it hard to quit.
- Smoking (burning tobacco) has added risks because it creates toxic and cancer-causing chemicals that you and your baby breathe, directly or second-hand.
- Vaping and newer nicotine products are less studied than cigarettes, and we don't yet know all the risks or harms to fertility, pregnancy and breastfeeding.
- It is never too late to quit. Quitting, especially early in pregnancy, lowers many risks for you and your baby.

There is no known safe amount of tobacco or nicotine if you're trying to get pregnant, are pregnant, or breastfeeding.

Fertility

Toxic chemicals in tobacco can make it harder to get pregnant.

These toxic chemicals can lead to menstrual problems like irregular periods, damage a woman's eggs, and shorten the number of years a woman is fertile.

Pregnancy

The toxic chemicals from smoking tobacco and using nicotine can pass from your body to the baby when you are pregnant.

These chemicals increase the risk of complications like miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy (where the baby grows outside the uterus), and stillbirth.

Tobacco and nicotine use also increase the risk of premature birth and having a low-birth weight baby. Premature babies and low-birth weight babies are more likely to have health problems.

**Traditional tobacco has a sacred and ceremonial role for many Indigenous peoples in Canada. This is very different from commercial tobacco, which is made for regular, recreational use and is harmful to health.*

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Baby

Babies exposed to tobacco or nicotine during pregnancy are at increased risk for long-term problems like difficulty with breathing and possible harm to their normal growth and development.

Babies and children that breathe secondhand tobacco smoke are at increased risk for breathing problems, infections, allergies, growth or development issues, or other health risks.

Thirdhand smoke is the leftover toxic residue from smoking and vaping that sticks to surfaces, clothes, and hair and can be breathed in or touched by babies and young children. Thirdhand smoke increases the risk of breathing problems, infections, and other health issues.

Breastfeeding

Nicotine can be passed to babies through breastmilk. It stays in breastmilk for about three hours.

The safest option is not to use nicotine while breastfeeding. If that's not possible, breastfeeding is still recommended.

If you use nicotine, follow these tips to reduce harm to your baby:

- Avoid smoking or using nicotine just before or during breastfeeding. It is less harmful if you breastfeed two hours after.
- After smoking/vaping, wash your hands and change your clothes before breastfeeding.
- Cut back on how much you use and how often you use.

Strategies to Quit and Reduce Harm

Quitting is the best way to lower risks for you and your baby.

You can use nicotine replacement therapy (NRT), like patches, gum, or lozenges, while pregnant or breastfeeding to help you cut back and quit.

If you have problems stopping or cutting back your tobacco or nicotine use, talk to your healthcare provider.

Avoid smoking or vaping anywhere your baby spends time. Keep your home, car, and clothes smoke and vapour free to protect them from second and thirdhand smoke or vapour.

For quit smoking support, check out this fact sheet.

References

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