Smoking and Pregnancy

Smoking cigarettes causes many health problems, including cancers, heart disease, and lung disease. When a pregnant woman smokes, she puts herself and her baby at risk. Because the fetus, a developing infant in the mother’s uterus (womb), is in contact with the mother's bloodstream, any chemicals the mother breathes or ingests can affect the fetus. This includes tobacco smoke coming from the mother’s smoking or inhaling smoke in the environment (also known as second-hand smoke). The March 9, 2005, issue of JAMA includes an article about the harm that smoking during pregnancy can cause.

PREGNANCY COMPLICATIONS ASSOCIATED WITH SMOKING

- Low birth weight
- Intrauterine (inside the uterus) growth delay
- Preterm labor
- Premature rupture of membranes (water bag), which may lead to preterm delivery or an infection affecting the baby
- Increased rates of stillbirths, miscarriages, and ectopic (outside the uterus) pregnancy
- Complications during delivery

PREVENTING BIRTH DEFECTS

- Do not smoke. If you do smoke, quit before planning a pregnancy.
- Take a folic acid supplement to prevent neural tube birth defects of the fetus.
- Do not use illegal drugs.
- Do not drink alcohol during pregnancy.
- Control chronic medical problems, like diabetes and high blood pressure. Poor control of these conditions can adversely affect the fetus.

HOW TO QUIT SMOKING

The best way to quit smoking is to stop smoking completely—not even a puff. Get rid of your cigarettes, ashtrays, lighters, or any other smoking-related items. Keep your hands busy with activities other than smoking. Take walks, remain active, and drink plenty of water. Ask your doctor for help. Resources are available for persons who wish to stop smoking.

For more information, visit the following websites:

- American Lung Association
  800/LUNGUSA
  www.lungusa.org
- March of Dimes
  www.modimes.org
- National Women’s Health Information Center
  800/994-WOMAN
  www.4woman.gov
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
  Office on Smoking and Health
  800/232-1311
  www.cdc.gov/tobacco

INFORM YOURSELF

To find this and previous JAMA Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page Index on JAMA’s Web site at www.jama.com. Many are available in English and Spanish. A Patient Page on quitting smoking was published in the July 24/31, 2002, issue.

Sources: American Lung Association; March of Dimes; National Women’s Health Information Center; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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