

# ***Smoking and Reproductive Health***

***The University of WI-Stevens Point is a tobacco-free campus***

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Among women, lung cancer deaths now surpass breast cancer deaths each year. Since 1950, lung cancer deaths among women have increased 600% (CDC). Heart attack deaths top them all. Many of these deaths could be prevented by simply not using cigarettes or any other form of tobacco.

Not everyone realizes that smoking can be very harmful to a woman's reproductive health as well as her respiratory health. The Surgeon General has linked cigarette smoking to many pregnancy problems. Imagine the effects of smoking on the health of a fetus!

## ***Cancer of the Cervix***

The cervix is the opening of the uterus into the vagina. Women who smoke are more likely to develop cervical cancer than those who don't smoke. The reason for this relationship is not known, but some studies have found a chemical byproduct of nicotine in the secretions of the cervix. The poisons in cigarette smoke may also get to the cervix through the bloodstream.

## ***Increased Risks with the Birth Control Pill***

Unfortunately, many women mistakenly believe that taking birth control pills is dangerous. Birth control pills used today are very safe and have a low failure rate in preventing pregnancy when used correctly and consistently. However, smoking cigarettes in combination with taking birth control pills increases the risk of adverse health effects.

Women who take birth control pills and smoke cigarettes are more likely to experience spotting or bleeding between periods. They also have an increased risk of serious heart, lung and blood vessel complications. Blood clots may form in the legs or pelvis, or break off and travel to the lungs, suddenly blocking the blood supply to the arteries of the heart resulting in a heart attack, or if in the brain, cause a disabling stroke. Smoking causes blood vessel constriction and the hormones in oral contraceptives make blood slightly more tacky. These effects together are risky.

## ***Difficulty Getting Pregnant***

Women who smoke cigarettes may have to wait longer to become pregnant than women who don't smoke. Studies

have found that women who smoke 16 to 20 cigarettes per day are 20% less likely to have given birth during the first year of attempted conceiving. In the second and third years of trying, about twice as many women who smoke have not given birth compared to women who don't smoke. Infertility rates are higher in smokers, so if you are trying to get pregnant not smoking can positively increase your chances of conceiving.

## ***Ectopic Pregnancy***

Women who smoke are 2 to 4 times more likely to have an ectopic pregnancy. An ectopic pregnancy occurs when a fertilized egg implants itself outside of the uterus, most commonly in the fallopian tubes. An ectopic pregnancy can be life threatening and requires medical treatment or an operation to terminate the pregnancy. It can also cause infertility. The risk of ectopic pregnancy increases with the number of cigarettes smoked per day and the length of time you have been smoking.

## ***Harm to Your Baby***

Pregnant women who smoke can harm their fetus by putting poisonous chemicals into their bloodstreams. Smoking increases the odds of having a spontaneous abortion or stillbirth. Smoking women have an increased risk of delivering the baby before the full term of pregnancy. Unfortunately, babies of mothers who smoke also have a 25% increased risk of death right after birth and are 3 times more likely to be a victim of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). Babies born to mothers who smoke weigh less than those born to mothers who don't smoke. The more the mother smokes, the less the baby weighs. Low birth weight is associated with an increased risk of health problems after birth.

Not only is cigarette smoke harmful to a fetus while inside the mother, but once the baby is born, second hand smoke is also detrimental to the infant's health. Secondhand smoke carries many chemicals, which may be unfiltered. Children of smokers are more likely to suffer from respiratory infections, asthma, bronchitis, pneumonia, and ear infections.

## ***Don't Smoke!***

Ask your physician/health care provider to help you quit smoking or for an alternative contraceptive method that does not increase your risk for side effects or



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complications. You can also contact the Student Health Promotion Office for additional information on quitting the use of tobacco products.



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