

# ***Smoking and Your Reproductive Health***

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Among women, lung cancer deaths now surpass breast cancer deaths each year. And heart attack deaths top them all. Not everyone realizes, however, that smoking is also harmful to a woman's reproductive health.

Can you imagine the harmful effects of smoking on the health of a fetus?

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

Women who smoke are more likely to develop cervical cancer than those who don't smoke. The reason for this relationship is not known, however, some studies have found a chemical byproduct of nicotine (the addictive drug in cigarettes) 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 the birth control pills is dangerous. Birth control pills used today are very safe and are 99% effective in preventing pregnancy when used correctly and consistently. The truth is that smoking cigarettes is much more dangerous to your health.

Women who take the birth control pill and smoke cigarettes are more likely to experience spotting or bleeding in between periods.

Women who smoke and take birth control pills have an increased risk of serious heart, lung and blood vessel complications. Blood clots may form in the legs or pelvis, break off and travel to the lungs, suddenly blocking the blood supply to the arteries of the heart resulting in a heart attack, or in the brain, causing a disabling stroke.

## ***Difficulty Getting Pregnant***

Women who smoke cigarettes can take longer to get 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 in the first year of trying. 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, stopping smoking can help your chances.

## ***Tubal Pregnancy***

Women who smoke have a 2 to 4 times greater risk of ectopic (tubal) pregnancy. The risk also gets higher the more cigarettes you smoke and the longer you have smoked. An ectopic pregnancy can be life threatening and requires medical treatment or an operation to terminate the pregnancy. It can also cause infertility.



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

Pregnant women who smoke can harm their fetus by putting poisonous chemicals into their bloodstream. Smoking increases the odds of having a spontaneous abortion or stillbirth.

Smoking women have an increased risk of delivering the baby before the full time of pregnancy (premature). Unfortunately, babies of smoking mothers also have about a 25% increased risk of death just after birth, and 3 times the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). Babies born to mothers who smoke weigh less than those born to women who don't smoke. The more the mother smokes, the less the babies weigh. Low birth weight is also associated with an increased risk of problems after birth.

The smoke itself can hurt the baby after its birth as well. Passive or environmental smoke carries chemicals that affect the health of infants, young children and adults. Children of smokers are more likely to suffer from respiratory infections, asthma, bronchitis, pneumonia and ear infections.

## ***Summary: 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 complications.

