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CARING FOR YOU

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FALL 2026

THE LATEST ON SMOKING CESSATION

SUPPORT EQUALS SUCCESS

Pregnancy is a strong motivator to quit smoking, but staying smoke-free after giving birth can still be challenging. In a U.S. study of 280 women, researchers found that most relapses happened within the first three months after childbirth, particularly among those with a long smoking history or multiple quitting attempts. Despite these challenges, nearly 50% reported not smoking for a complete year after giving birth, showing that it is possible to quit. With additional support right after delivery and continued encouragement from your doctor and loved ones, many mothers can avoid relapses.

SOURCE: *Nicotine & Tobacco Research*

About **7% to 4%**

Decline in the number of women who smoked cigarettes at any point during pregnancy in the U.S. from 2016 to 2022.

SOURCE: CDC

2x

Increase in the risk of infertility among women who smoke compared with nonsmokers.

SOURCE: American Society for Reproductive Medicine

WHAT MAKES QUITTING SO HARD?

Stressful life events during pregnancy are linked to unhealthy coping behaviors like smoking, and they can also raise health risks. A survey of 24,209 U.S. mothers shows that smoking during pregnancy and after delivery was more common among women facing trauma, financial strain, or relationship challenges, which also increased their risk for health issues such as high blood pressure or depression. By receiving stress screening, emotional care, and help from trained support workers throughout the perinatal period, women can feel understood and better equipped to quit smoking.

SOURCE: *Maternal and Child Health Journal*



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and your baby's health.**



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STATS & FACTS

Reviewed by Melinda Ratini, DO, MS,
WebMD Medical Reviewer

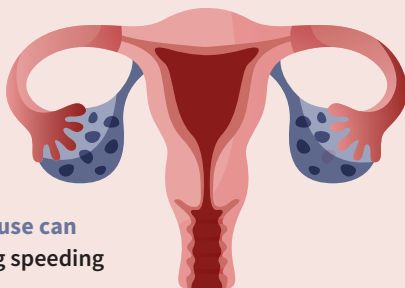


ABOUT **3 in 5**

Number of U.S. women who said a health care provider asked about smoking during a checkup after childbirth, based on a survey.

1 to 4

How many years earlier menopause can happen in women due to smoking speeding up the loss of eggs in the ovaries.



WITHIN 3

Number of months after you stop smoking in which lung function starts improving and your heart attack risk begins to drop.

2x

Increase in abnormal bleeding risk during pregnancy and delivery among women who smoke.

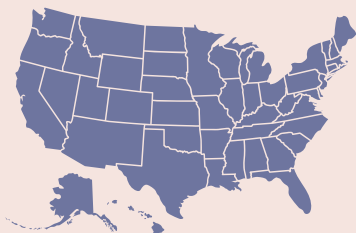


60

Duration in minutes of secondhand smoke exposure that can cause harm to the lungs, causing inflammation.

NEARLY 34,000

Number of adults in the U.S. who do not smoke but die early from heart disease caused by secondhand smoke each year.



OVER 7,000

Number of chemicals found in tobacco smoke, which is why staying smoke-free is important, especially for your children.



SOURCES: CDC, American Society for Reproductive Medicine, American Lung Association

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WHY IS QUITTING SMOKING SO DIFFICULT?

An expert weighs in

By Kendall K. Morgan

Reviewed by Melinda Ratini, DO, MS, WebMD Medical Reviewer

It's especially important to quit smoking when you're pregnant or trying to get pregnant. But quitting isn't easy.

Understanding what makes quitting hard may help you go easier on yourself. It may also help you find a way around the challenges and say goodbye to smoking. Beating yourself up isn't the solution.

SMOKING IS ADDICTIVE

Nicotine is highly addictive, says Humberto Choi, MD, a pulmonologist at Cleveland Clinic's main campus in Ohio.

"Many people smoke for a long time," Choi says. "Over time, you develop tolerance to nicotine. You'll need to smoke more to get the same effect."

YOUR BRAIN ON NICOTINE

When you smoke, nicotine goes quickly to your brain. Once there, your brain releases other chemicals that give you a good feeling. As you get used to that, your brain actually starts to work differently.

Without nicotine, you may feel anxious or upset. You may find it hard to think or sleep. It will get better over time. But if you're struggling to get through this stage, ask your doctor for help.

BREAK THE HABIT

You probably smoke at certain times of the day or during or after certain activities.

"When you talk to people who smoke and have a hard time [quitting], it's not only the nicotine but also the habit," Choi says. "They associate smoking when drinking coffee,

waking up, taking a walk, or doing something pleasurable. That's what makes it hard to stop."



FIGHT THE URGE

You may also find yourself wanting a cigarette when you feel certain ways. Maybe you are stressed out, gloomy, happy, or relaxed.

To quit, you'll need new routines. You'll need to find ways to get through the urges to smoke without lighting up.

TRY, TRY AGAIN

What if you've tried to quit before and it didn't work? You're in good company. Most people who've quit tried more than once before they stopped smoking for good, Choi says.

"People tend to think it's not working or never going to work and feel they don't want to try again," Choi says.

But, he says, you shouldn't expect immediate success. It may take weeks, months, or another try. But it's never too late to improve your health and that of your children by quitting.

TIPS TO QUIT

Make a plan to get through the tough moments. Try the below:

- + Ask your doctor for advice.
- + Go to **Women.SmokeFree.gov** for information and resources.
- + Text MOM to 222888 to join the text messaging program **SmokeFreeMOM**.
- + Join an online or local support group.
- + Download an app to help you track your cravings and see your progress.
- + Call **800-Quit-Now** for helpful information and support.

Inclusion of these organizations does not constitute an endorsement by WebMD and no endorsement is implied.

PROGRESS, NOT PERFECTION

To quit successfully, focus on encouragement and support

By Kendall K. Morgan

Reviewed by Neha Pathak, MD, WebMD Chief Physician Editor



When you're pregnant or caring for a new baby, it's best to quit smoking or vaping to improve your own health and avoid exposing your infant to nicotine, smoke, or vapor. To develop a successful quit plan, it helps to recognize first that smoking during pregnancy is more complex than nicotine addiction alone, says Anita Hargrave, MD, a general internist at UCSF Health in San Francisco studying trauma-informed approaches to help pregnant women quit.

"Women face biological, psychological, and social barriers that all come together to make quitting especially difficult," Hargrave says. "We see that many people trying to quit, especially during pregnancy, are struggling with experiences of trauma and external stresses such as financial strain, housing instability, or relationship challenges that make it much harder."

CLEARING HURDLES

Your doctor might not recommend using nicotine gum, patches, nasal sprays, or non-nicotine medications to help you quit. While those tools can help to reduce nicotine cravings, Hargrave says that's because there's limited evidence on their safety when you're pregnant or breastfeeding.

Resources like counseling, social support, or stress reduction can help. But Hargrave notes they are too often limited or unavailable. You may hesitate to discuss your smoking or vaping habit and struggle to quit with your doctor as well.

RESPECT THE PROCESS

Despite these obstacles, Hargrave says one way to make progress is to identify and address the underlying factors, or drivers, behind your smoking. Working toward healthier ways to cope

with stress and trauma are key while remembering that the first few days are the toughest. Lean on others who can support you, and recognize that smoking cessation is a process, not a single event.

"For many people, it takes multiple times to quit before they fully stop smoking, and that's part of a long-term success," Hargrave says. "If you relapse or start to smoke again, it shouldn't be seen as a failure, but rather as part of the process, part of that long-term journey to smoking cessation. Every quit counts. Anytime you're able to decrease or stop smoking at any point, that is beneficial to the mother and to the infant."

FIND SUPPORT

+ SmokeFree.gov

SmokeFree.gov/Quit-Smoking

+ American Lung Association

Lung.org/Quit-Smoking

+ CDC Smoking and Tobacco Use

CDC.gov/Tobacco/HCP/Patient-Care/Quitlines-And-Other-Resources.html

Inclusion of these organizations does not constitute an endorsement by WebMD and no endorsement is implied.

THE DANGERS OF SMOKING DURING AND AFTER PREGNANCY

What you should know

By Stephanie Watson

Reviewed by Melinda Ratini, DO, MS, WebMD Medical Reviewer

Everything you do when you're pregnant, your growing baby does, too. When you smoke, thousands of harmful chemicals make their way across the placenta to your baby. One of those chemicals, carbon monoxide, depletes your body of oxygen.

"Babies need a lot of oxygen," says Emily Adhikari, MD, an assistant professor at UT Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas who specializes in maternal-fetal medicine. "Babies who don't get enough oxygen don't grow."

Many of the risks that are linked to smoking during pregnancy—including low birthweight, miscarriage, stillbirth, and premature delivery (before 37 weeks)—happen from a lack of oxygen, blood flow, and nutrition to your growing baby, says Katrina S. Mark, MD, an OB/GYN at the University of Maryland Medical Center in Baltimore.

Babies born to moms who smoke also have more birth defects like cleft lip and cleft palate. These openings in the upper lip or roof of the mouth affect your baby's ability to eat, and they may need to be corrected with surgery.

Smoking is dangerous for you, too. "It carries all the risks that it carried before pregnancy, but additionally, the respiratory risks to mom are increased," Mark says. Smoking lowers your lung capacity and makes it harder for you to breathe.

Having other smokers in the house is also a problem. Babies who are exposed to secondhand smoke are more likely to be born small or with birth defects.

RISKS AS YOUR BABY GROWS

The dangers of smoking during pregnancy don't disappear once your baby arrives. "Children who are born to mothers who smoke are at increased risk



for sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)," says Kecia Gaither, MD, director of perinatal services and director of maternal fetal medicine at NYC Health + Hospitals/Lincoln in the Bronx, NY. "As these children grow, they're

WOMEN STILL SMOKE DURING PREGNANCY

Despite the risks involved, about 1 in 14 pregnant women smoke cigarettes during their pregnancy, according to the CDC. If you are one of them, talk to your doctor for help quitting today.



THE EFFECTS OF SMOKING ON CHILDREN

Kids born to mothers who smoke are at increased risk for these problems as they grow:

- + Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)
- + Obesity
- + High blood pressure
- + Type 2 diabetes
- + Asthma
- + Behavior problems

more likely to develop respiratory infections and asthma because the tobacco smoke affected their lung development.”

Damage to the baby’s brain in utero can continue to cause problems later in life. Children of smokers are slower to reach milestones and to learn. They also have more behavior problems than their peers.

WHEN AND HOW TO QUIT

The best time to quit is before you start trying to conceive. Smoking can affect fertility, making it harder for you to get pregnant.

Mark suggests giving yourself at least 30 smoke-free days. Not only are those first 30 days the hardest when you’re trying to quit, but a month will give your body a chance to get back to normal. But, she adds, “Anytime somebody is willing to quit is a good time.” Even late in your pregnancy, quitting can improve the blood flow your baby needs to grow.

While counseling is the preferred treatment for pregnant women who smoke, talk to your doctor about nicotine replacement products such as a nicotine receptor blocker or an antidepressant that has nicotine receptor-blocking activity. When used during pregnancy, these drugs do not have an increased risk of major birth defects. And while these options are not risk-free, they work better than quitting cold turkey.

Combining these methods with counseling can increase your odds of success. But ultimately, the best smoking cessation technique is the one that works for you.

Be patient with yourself as you try to quit. “I take care of pregnant people who use all manner of drugs, and nicotine is the one that is the hardest to stop,” Mark says. “People should not feel ashamed or defeated if they need support. It’s a process.”

HOW TO RIDE OUT CRAVINGS

Breaking old smoking routines can help you get past the urge

By Sonya Collins

Reviewed by Neha Pathak, MD, WebMD Chief Physician Editor

During pregnancy or after your baby is born, you may be more motivated than ever to quit smoking. But that doesn't mean the urge to smoke disappears overnight. Reaching for a cigarette is deeply ingrained in your routine. You may habitually light up after every meal, over coffee, and whenever a bout of stress comes along.

When those reflex-like urges rear their head, be ready with new behaviors to take the place of smoking.

"Do something different at that moment than what you used to do, which was smoke," says Frank Vitale, national director, Pharmacy Partnership for Tobacco Cessation at the University of California San Francisco.

THOUGHT DOESN'T HAVE TO BECOME ACTION

During trigger moments—on your drive to work, after lunch, while you walk the dog—you're going to think, "I want a cigarette."

"The natural reaction for most people is to try to stop thinking about it," Vitale says. "But that just makes you think about it more." Instead, he says, just acknowledge the thought and move on. "Just because you think about it, doesn't mean you have to do it."



CHANGE YOUR ROUTINE

Make a list—mental or written—of all the activities you typically pair with smoking and plan what you're going to do instead.

When you think of smoking, be prepared to do something else. Immediately after a meal, brush your teeth. Take a walk. Wash the dishes. On your commute, belt out your favorite tunes or call a friend.

OTHER HELPFUL HACKS

If you miss the act of bringing a cigarette to your mouth, replace it with a straw, a pen, or a cinnamon stick.

When you know a trigger is coming, visualize yourself getting through that moment without smoking. Rehearse in your mind what you'll do instead.

When you want a cigarette, repeat a mantra until the desire fades. Maybe it's "I am calm. I am content."

Remind yourself of your why. "I want to be healthy. I want to see my kids graduate. Whatever your motivation is," Vitale says, "focus on that."

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Find direction in advice from an expert

By Rachel Reiff Ellis Reviewed by Brunilda Nazario, MD, WebMD Chief Physician Editor, Medical Affairs

Trying to quit smoking can sometimes feel like pushing a boulder up a hill. But even though it's hard at times, you *can* do it. Use these uplifting words as motivation for your journey.

SET A DATE

If you haven't already, give yourself a concrete goal to work toward. Talk to your doctor or other guiding voice to help you decide when that might realistically be.

"Make sure you choose a day that gives you enough time to prepare mentally, physically, and emotionally," says Michael Kosloski, tobacco treatment specialist at RWJBarnabas Health in New Jersey.

Some people find that starting at the "beginning"—the first day of the week, month, or year—is a good way to kick off a new habit.

FIGURE OUT WHAT TRIGGERS YOU

Like most habits, smoking happens at regular times, some of which you may not be aware of. Take some time to note when you crave a cigarette and write it down. When those moments arrive in the future, you'll be prepared with preventative measures.

"Common triggers include being around other smokers, drinking alcohol or coffee, and stress," Kosloski says.

FIND A BUDDY

Make sure you have a support system to encourage you and lift you up when the going gets tough.

"Having a support system can make all the difference when you're trying to quit," Kosloski says.

If you have a friend who's in the same boat as you are, you can be accountability partners and find new hobbies

and habits together. Support groups are another lifeline for those looking to change their lifestyle for good.

RECOGNIZE YOUR WINS

Quitting smoking is hard work, so be sure you're marking success, no matter how small, says Kosloski.

One way to do this is to set aside some of the money you would have spent on cigarettes and use it to buy something that brings you joy. Take yourself or a loved one out for a nice dinner, or treat yourself to a concert or other outing.

"You're doing a difficult thing, but you will get there," Kosloski says. "Keep going."





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