

Reducing exposure to cigarettes

While the number is decreasing, one in eight pregnant women in Western Australia still smoke.

In Aboriginal Western Australians and socially disadvantaged women, this number is much higher, reaching as high as 50 per cent.

Smoking in pregnancy is the most common preventable risk factor for a whole range of poor pregnancy outcomes and all pregnant women need to be aware of the dangers of cigarette smoke and how to reduce their risk.

The chemicals and nicotine in cigarette smoke are directly toxic to the placenta and reduce its ability to function, resulting in the fetus receiving less oxygen and nutrients than it needs.

The carbon monoxide in the smoke also replaces oxygen in the fetal blood, an effect, which can last up to six hours after the mother has smoked.

The result of this is a baby who can struggle to grow, is more likely to be born early and more likely to die, either in utero or in the early neonatal period.

Babies who struggle to grow in utero are more likely to need to be delivered early to survive.

They also are at risk of having a range of long-term health issues in later life such as obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease.

Babies born preterm are more likely to be separated from their mothers, have damage to the brain and gut, difficulty breathing and feeding and long-term neurodevelopmental issues.

Babies exposed to cigarettes in early life have a higher rate of sudden infant death, asthma and other respiratory issues, allergies and pneumonia.

It is important for pregnant women to know that the best way to prevent these poor health outcomes is avoidance of cigarettes altogether. This includes passive smoking.

Whilst cutting down the number of



Dr. Suzanne Meharry



cigarettes smoked is always good, the real benefit in pregnancy is not seen until a woman completely gives up smoking.

It is also important for women to know that quitting in pregnancy will cause no harm to the fetus.

They are also encouraged to see their GP or pregnancy healthcare provider to discuss nicotine replacement, which in general, is safer in pregnancy than smoking.

Stopping exposure to cigarettes in pregnancy is the key to setting up a healthy life for both mother and baby.

Resources to help women who are smoking and pregnant include Quitline WA on 13 78 48 and www.quitnow.gov.au.

Dr. Suzanne Meharry

Consultant Obstetrician
Preterm Birth Prevention Clinic
King Edward Memorial Hospital

Quit for you. Quit for two.

When a baby's on the way, it's twice as important to get the support you need to quit smoking. Phone **Quitline (13 7848)** and ask about **Quit for you Quit for two**. They can help you beat the cravings, with tips like the 4Ds listed here.

- **Delay:** *Delay for a few minutes – the urge will pass*
- **Deep breathe:** *Breathe slowly and deeply*
- **Do something else:** *Ring a friend or practise your prenatal exercises*
- **Drink water:** *Take 'time out' and sip slowly*

When you choose to quit, you lower the risk of:

- **miscarriage**
- **premature labour**
- **ectopic pregnancy**
- **SIDS**

Download the free app

Go to the App Store or Android Market now to download **Quit for you Quit for two** for free, and get your pregnancy off to a healthy start.

MAKE SMOKING
HISTORY
makesmokinghistory.org.au

