

# Pregnancy and nicotine replacement therapy (NRT)

What you need  
to know





Pregnancy is a great opportunity to stop smoking. Avoiding tobacco is the most important thing a woman can do to improve her health and that of her unborn baby.

Lots of women cut down on cigarettes when they find out they are pregnant, and this is a positive step. However, evidence tells us that only completely stopping smoking protects the unborn baby and the mother from the harm that smoking causes. Studies have shown that women who cut down on their cigarette use while pregnant have not necessarily reduced their exposure to the toxins associated with smoking.



Additional evidence shows that the impact of not quitting smoking entirely stretches beyond pregnancy. Firstly, children are more likely to take up smoking if their parents smoke. Furthermore, research highlights the possible damage - to both mother and child - caused by exposure to second-hand smoke.

In pregnancy, the safest option is to give up smoking without the use of nicotine replacement therapy (NRT). You can improve your chances of quitting by attending a support group for stopping smoking or getting support from your midwife, partner, family, friends, or any one of over 600 stop smoking services across Northern Ireland, most of which are based in GP practices and pharmacies - visit [www.stopsmokingni.info](http://www.stopsmokingni.info) for more information on these services. Having a smoke-free house can also help.

However, nicotine addiction is one of the major reasons why people continue to smoke cigarettes, so if you can't manage to quit with support, talk to your GP or midwife about licensed NRT. As well as nicotine, cigarettes expose you and your baby to around 4,000 other hazardous toxins, so a short course of licensed NRT is safer for you and your baby than continuing to smoke.

## Licensed NRT available for pregnant mums

Although no medicine is completely risk-free, a licence indicates that all the proper safety and quality checks have been carried out and the product is safe to use for the purpose intended.

If you decide to use licensed NRT, try the short-acting oral forms of NRT first, like gum or lozenges. If you experience pregnancy-related nausea and vomiting with these, you could try patches instead, as some products work well for some people but not others.

You are advised to avoid trying patches first as they provide a constant delivery of nicotine into your body and they should never be used overnight. If you try various forms of licensed NRT and continue to experience nausea and vomiting, stop using NRT products and ask a health professional for advice.

Stop smoking medications such as Champix® and Zyban® are not recommended during pregnancy.

**With medical advice**, these licensed NRT products can be used in pregnancy.

### **Nicotine gum**

When you chew nicotine gum, the nicotine is absorbed through the lining of your mouth.

### **Microtabs**

These are small nicotine tablets that dissolve quickly under your tongue.

### **Lozenges (not liquorice flavour)**

Lozenges are sucked slowly to release the nicotine and take about 20-30 minutes to dissolve.



## **Inhalators**

Inhalators look like a plastic cigarette. They release nicotine vapour, which is absorbed through your mouth and throat. If you miss the 'hand to mouth' aspect of smoking, these may suit you.

## **Nasal spray**

The nasal spray delivers a swift dose of nicotine that is absorbed through the lining of your nose.

## **Mouth spray**

The mouth spray delivers a quick dose of nicotine that is absorbed through the lining of your mouth.

## **Oral strips**

These dissolve on your tongue and release nicotine fast, with a fresh, minty flavour. They fully dissolve in approximately three minutes and are recommended for light smokers.

## **Nicotine patches**

Nicotine patches are not ideal for pregnant women as they deliver a stronger flow of nicotine. If you do choose patches, only use them during the day.

**Pregnant women are advised to avoid liquorice flavoured NRT products. Although there is no known risk from small amounts of liquorice flavouring, the manufacturers advise caution. This is based on information on the adverse effects associated with excessive amounts of liquorice root.**

Licensed NRT is available on prescription from your GP. Many GP practices, pharmacies, health and social care trusts, community and voluntary organisations and provide a stop smoking service where licensed NRT can be supplied if appropriate. Visit **[www.stopsmokingni.info](http://www.stopsmokingni.info)** and click on the interactive map to find your local stop smoking service providers.

## What about e-cigarettes?

Please read this information leaflet in full before making any decision to use an e-cigarette

E-cigarettes can also provide a form of nicotine replacement; however they are not currently licensed as a medicinal quit aid and therefore do not have stringent quality and safety controls in place. E-cigarettes are not recommended as a quit aid during pregnancy and are not available through stop smoking services in Northern Ireland.

It is important to stay away from all sources of tobacco smoke and not to relapse to smoking during pregnancy.

The best ways to quit smoking in pregnancy, in order of preference, are:

1. Get support from a stop smoking service, and do not use any form of NRT.
2. Get support from a stop smoking service, and if required seek advice from your stop smoking service on the use of licensed NRT.
3. Get support from a stop smoking service, and if you choose to use an e-cigarette do so on the understanding that their safety in pregnancy is unclear.

## Help yourself

When you are tempted to smoke, try one of the four Ds:

**Delay** acting on the urge to smoke.

**Deep** breaths.

**Drink** water.

**Do** something else.



# Stop smoking service providers

## Belfast area

### **Mater Hospital**

Stop Smoking Specialist Midwife  
Mob: 079 1934 7563

### **Royal Jubilee Maternity Hospital**

Stop Smoking Specialist Midwife  
Mob: 077 7136 6578

## Northern area

### **Causeway Locality**

Stop Smoking Specialist Midwife  
Mob: 075 8402 3601

### **Antrim Locality**

Stop Smoking Specialist Midwife  
Mob: 077 8222 2997

### **Ballymena**

Stop Smoking Specialist Midwife  
Mob: 077 8222 2997

### **Carrickfergus/Larne/Whiteabbey**

Stop Smoking Specialist Midwife  
Mob: 078 8764 7915

### **Mid-Ulster Locality**

Stop Smoking Specialist Midwife  
Mob: 077 8222 2997

## Southern area

### **Southern Health and Social Care Trust Stop Smoking Service**

Tel: 028 3756 4400

Email: [stop.smoking@southerntrust.hscni.net](mailto:stop.smoking@southerntrust.hscni.net)

## South Eastern area

Stop Smoking Specialist Midwife

Mob: 077 1504 4886

Stop Smoking Specialist Midwife

Mob: 077 1415 3607

## Western area

The Western Health and Social Care Trust specialist stop smoking team provides services to pregnant women in both hospital and community settings. The Trust's smoke-free helpline is available 9am–5pm, Monday to Friday, on 0800 917 9388.

For help and advice on stopping smoking visit  
[www.stopsmokingni.info](http://www.stopsmokingni.info)



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### Public Health Agency

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[www.publichealth.hscni.net](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net)

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