

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.

In studies, the levels of carbon monoxide (CO) in women who said they had reduced their smoking during pregnancy showed they had not necessarily reduced their exposure to toxins. Additional evidence highlights the importance for a pregnant woman to quit smoking altogether rather than just cutting down.



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, it is safer to give up smoking without the use of nicotine replacement therapy (NRT). If you can't manage this, talk to your GP or midwife about licensed NRT. A short course of licensed NRT is safer for you and your baby than continuing to smoke.

Because cigarettes expose the mother and baby to nicotine and many other toxins (4,000 in total) smoking is far more hazardous than nicotine obtained from an alternative, regulated and cleaner source such as licensed NRT products.

Nicotine addiction is one of the major reasons why people continue to smoke cigarettes. If you would like support during your quit attempt, ask your GP or pharmacist about specialist stop smoking services, which will increase your chances of quitting.

What else can you do?

Attending a support group for stopping smoking or getting support from your midwife, partner, family, friends, GP or pharmacist and having a smoke-free house can help.

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. 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.

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.

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.

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.

If you decide to use licensed NRT, try intermittent 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 when sleeping. 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.

Licensed NRT is available on prescription from your GP. Many GP practices, pharmacies, Health and Social Care Trusts, community and voluntary organisations, and workplace stop smoking services provide a service where licensed NRT can be supplied if appropriate. Visit www.want2stop.info and click on the stop smoking services page to find your local stop smoking service providers.

What about e-cigarettes?

E-cigarettes can also provide a form of nicotine replacement but they have not been licensed or controlled and their safety in pregnancy is unclear. There is not as much evidence for e-cigarettes being a useful and safe aid to quitting smoking as there is for licensed and well established stop smoking medications. However some women have stopped smoking completely using an e-cigarette and this is good news.

It is important to stay away from all sources of tobacco smoke and not to relapse to smoking during pregnancy. If an e-cigarette is the only option that will prevent this relapse then it would be considered a safer option than continuing to smoke (Source: Smoking Cessation: A briefing for midwifery staff, produced by the National Centre for Smoking Cessation and Training in partnership with Public Health England).

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

Fiona McCambridge
Smoking Cessation Midwife
Mob: 079 1934 7563

Southern area

Daisy Hill Hospital

Ursula Gaffney
Mob: 077 9544 5710
Email: ursula.gaffney@shsct.hscni.net

Craigavon Area Hospital

Roisin Donohue
Mob: 077 9544 5918
Email: roisin.donohue@shsct.hscni.net

Northern area

Causeway Area Hospital

Annette Barclay
Smoking Cessation Midwife
Mob: 075 8402 3601
Email: annette.barclay@northerntrust.hscni.net

Mid-Ulster Hospital

Kerry Bate
Smoking Cessation Midwife
Tel: 028 7936 6799
Mob: 077 8222 2997
Email: kerry.bate@northerntrust.hscni.net

Antrim Area Hospital

Sonia Shirlow
Mob: 078 2733 4605
Email: sonia.shirlow@northerntrust.hscni.net

Carrick Health Centre

Andrea Howard
Mob: 078 8764 7915
Email: andrea.howard@northerntrust.hscni.net

South Eastern area

Cathy Bell
Tel: 028 9250 1376
Email: cathy.bell@setrust.hscni.net

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.

Text 'Quit' to 70004
for stop smoking SMS
text support.



You can also
follow Want2stop
on Facebook.



Acknowledgement

This leaflet has been adapted with the permission of Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.



Public Health Agency

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www.publichealth.hscni.net

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