

Pregnancy and nicotine replacement therapy (NRT)

What you need
to know



Public Health
Agency





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 the importance for pregnant women of quitting smoking entirely.



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, pharmacist or health professional about specialist stop smoking services, which will increase your chances of quitting.

What else can you do?

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 650 stop smoking services across Northern Ireland, most of which are based in GP practices and pharmacies - visit www.want2stop.info for more information on these services. Having a smoke-free house can also 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?

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 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.¹

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 nicotine replacement therapy.
2. Get support from a stop smoking service, and if required seek advice from your stop smoking service on the use of licensed nicotine replacement therapy.
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.

¹Source: 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

Mater Hospital

Fiona McCambridge
Smoking Cessation Specialist Midwife
Mob: 079 1934 7563
Email: fiona.mccambridge@
belfasttrust.hscni.net

Royal Jubilee Maternity Hospital

Caroline Semple
Smoking Cessation Specialist Midwife
Mob: 077 7136 6578
Email: caroline.semple@belfasttrust.
hscni.net

Northern area

Ballycastle/Ballymoney/Coleraine

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

Mid Ulster area

Kerry Bate
Smoking Cessation Midwife
Mob: 077 9629 0383
Email: kerry.bate@northerntrust.
hscni.net

Antrim/Ballymena/Ballyclare

Mary Maxwell
Smoking Cessation Midwife
Mob: 078 6766 5862
Email: mary.maxwell@
northerntrust.hscni.net

Carrickfergus/Larne/Whiteabbey

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

Southern area

Daisy Hill Hospital

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

Craigavon Area Hospital

Smoking cessation midwife
Mob: 077 9544 5918

South Eastern area

Cathy Bell
Health Improvement Midwife
Mob: 077 1504 4886
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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