

Planning for Pregnancy WOMEN WITH ASTHMA

Background

Asthma is one of the most common chronic health problems for women of childbearing age. An estimated 8% of pregnant women have asthma. Proper control of asthma before pregnancy will allow the woman to have a healthy pregnancy with little or no increased risk to herself or her fetus. Asthma is under good control if the woman has her best possible lung function, can sleep through the night without asthma symptoms, and can be active without having asthma symptoms.

How Asthma Affects Pregnancy

Asthma that is not properly controlled during pregnancy can result in serious complications for both the mother and the fetus. Complications for the mother may include preeclampsia and high blood pressure. Fetal complications include increased still-birth and infant death, growth problems, premature birth, and low birth weight.

How Pregnancy Affects Asthma

The majority of women who have asthma report either no change or a decrease in asthma symptoms during pregnancy. However, up to 30% of women may experience a worsening of their asthma, especially if it is severe or poorly controlled prior to pregnancy. Most of these flare-ups happen between 24 to 36 weeks of pregnancy. Women who have an increase in severity of symptoms during pregnancy are likely to have this happen in future pregnancies. Other factors that can affect asthma control during pregnancy include viral infections, active smoking, and not taking asthma medications as prescribed.

How Medications for Asthma May Affect Pregnancy

Asthma medications can be used safely during pregnancy, ask your health care provider to review the medications you are taking to make sure they are the most effective for your symptoms. Use the smallest effective dose of each medication. Using asthma medications appropriately will optimize the amount of oxygen that gets to your baby and reduce the risk of complications. Ask your health care provider about using a peak flow meter and a spacer.

What You Can Do

- 1) Talk to your health care provider if you are thinking about becoming pregnant.*
- 2) Talk to your health care provider about any prescription, over-the-counter, or herbal treatments you are using.*
- 3) Avoid or control exposure to asthma “triggers.” These include any allergens or irritants that bring on your asthma symptoms, as well as tobacco smoke.*
- 4) Get immediate treatment if your asthma symptoms get worse.*



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