

Substance Use & Pregnancy: Tobacco, Vaping & Other Nicotine Products



Tobacco is a plant that contains nicotine, a highly addictive chemical. Commercial nicotine products include cigarettes, vape/e-liquids, nicotine pouches, gums, cigars and various other products. Use and exposure to nicotine and tobacco during pregnancy can cause significant health problems for both a mother and baby.

Are you pregnant and using tobacco or other nicotine products?
Here are some important questions to discuss with a doctor

What are some strategies that can be used to manage symptoms of nicotine withdrawal?

For someone using nicotine products to cope with stress and anxiety, what alternatives would you suggest to help them manage their well-being?

What are the risks of using tobacco during pregnancy for both me and my baby?

What research has been done to study the effects of vaping on pregnancy?

What local resources are available to help me quit smoking/vaping while pregnant?



Key Facts To Consider

- Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death around the world.¹
- Smoking can make it harder to get pregnant; women who smoke have a harder time getting pregnant. It can damage sperm and cause erectile dysfunction in men.²
- More research is needed to understand the impact of chemicals and flavoring compounds found in vaping on an unborn child.³



Tobacco & Nicotine Use During Pregnancy

- Carbon monoxide in tobacco smoke can harm the baby's central nervous system and delay its growth.⁴ It can also prevent food and oxygen from being passed to the baby, resulting in underdeveloped organs.⁵
- Nicotine from smoking or vaping restricts blood flow, oxygen and nutrients through the placenta, which harms the baby's developing lungs and brain. This could lead to long-term health issues, such as developmental delays and learning disabilities.⁴
- Increased risk of birth defects, including cleft lip and cleft palate that occurs when the tissue in the upper lip or roof of the mouth doesn't fully form during pregnancy.⁶
- Smoking can damage the placenta, increasing the risk of placental abruption (separation from the uterus wall) and placenta previa (covering the cervical opening), both of which can be life-threatening for the mother and baby.⁴
- Vaping during pregnancy is linked to preterm birth.⁷



Complications With Delivery

- Nicotine from smoking or vape use can cause low birth weight, increasing the risk of illness and infection.⁷
- Using tobacco increases the chances of preterm delivery, ectopic pregnancy (pregnancy outside the uterus), miscarriage, stillbirth, spontaneous delivery and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (see next page).¹



Substance Use & Pregnancy: Tobacco, Vaping & Other Nicotine Products



Nicotine, Tobacco & Breastfeeding

- Some e-cigarettes contain flavoring additives that can reduce milk supply.⁸
- Smoking can negatively impact both the quantity and quality of breast milk, which may hinder the baby's nutritional intake.⁹
- Nicotine and other harmful substances from cigarettes and e-liquids can transfer through breast milk, negatively affecting a baby's health.
- Babies of mothers who smoke while breastfeeding are at a higher risk for conditions like colic and irregular sleep patterns.



Impact on Early Childhood

- Nicotine can impair early development of an infant's brain.^{1,3}
- Secondhand smoke exposure can put an infant at risk of SIDS, bronchitis/pneumonia, asthma, ear infections and impaired lung function.^{8,9}
- Vaping is associated with issues with motor skills and emotional regulation, while long term effects (risks of heart disease, cancer) are still being researched.⁷
- Smoking during pregnancy can cause life-long consequences and risks, including:
 - Weaker lungs resulting in respiratory problems, high risk of asthma
 - Increased risk of heart disease and diabetes.
 - Other risks include sudden infant death syndrome (see below), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and obesity in childhood.
 - Increased risk of various types of cancer⁶

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)¹⁰

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) is the unexplained death of a healthy baby, usually under one, often during sleep. Babies have a higher risk of SIDS if their mother used nicotine products or other substances during and after pregnancy, or the baby is exposed to a tobacco smoke environment.

Nicotine use (including cigarettes, vape products and nicotine pouches) can cause premature birth and low birth weight, which increases the chance of SIDS. Second-hand smoke also contains several toxic chemicals that can damage the cells of the body and affect how a baby's brain regulates breathing. This can increase the risk of SIDS in infants during the first year of life. It is essential to receive prenatal care early and regularly to help reduce the risk of SIDS.

Reference List

1. World Health Organization, 2025. [Tobacco](#).
2. Center for Disease Control, 2023. [Smoking, Pregnancy and Babies](#).
3. Mayo Clinic, 2025. [Pregnancy week by week: Is vaping during pregnancy OK?](#)
4. Government of Canada, 2025. [Tobacco and Pre and Post Natal Risks](#).
5. Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), retrieved 2025. [Prenets: How can tobacco affect pregnancy?](#)
6. Mayo Clinic, 2025. [Cleft lip and cleft palate](#).
7. Centre of Excellence for Women's Health, 2023. [Vaping During Pregnancy and Postpartum](#).
8. Canadian Paediatric Society, 2024. [Tobacco use and misuse among Indigenous children and youth in Canada](#).
9. Newfoundland Eastern Health, 2024. [Smoking, Vaping and Breastfeeding](#).
10. Alberta Health Services, 2024. [Breastfeeding: Tobacco, Alcohol, and Drugs](#).
11. Government of Canada, 2023. [Tobacco and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome \(SIDS\)](#).