

# Women and Tobacco



## Tobacco

- There are many types of tobacco. *Nicotiana tabacum*, or common tobacco, is used to make cigarettes, cigars, and bidis. There are also smokeless forms of tobacco such as snuff, chewing tobacco, and snus. In some cultures, tobacco has been used traditionally in ceremonies, rituals, and prayer.
- Tobacco is a stimulant that produces a feeling of well-being. It also increases your heart rate and blood pressure and constricts your blood vessels, irritates your lungs, and affects your ability to taste and smell.
- Nicotine is the addictive chemical found in tobacco. There are over 4000 other chemicals in cigarettes and cigarette smoke.
- Second-hand smoke is the smoke from the end of a cigarette and the smoke that smokers breathe out. It contains toxic chemicals including tar, nicotine, carbon monoxide, arsenic, and cyanide. Nonsmokers who breathe it absorb these substances and are also at risk for the several serious health consequences as smokers.

## Tobacco and Your Reproductive Health

- Tobacco use can affect your period. It can make your periods irregular, contribute to spotting or bleeding between periods, or lead to cramping during or before your period. It can also make your menstrual cycle shorter.
- Tobacco use can affect your ability to conceive. Women who smoke or use other forms of tobacco also have a higher risk of having a miscarriage or an ectopic pregnancy (where the fetus grows outside the uterus).
- Tobacco use can affect your fertility. It can lead to earlier menopause and less success with in vitro fertilization.

## Tobacco and Your Health

- Tobacco use has a wide range of effects on health and some risks specific to women's health.
- Some of the serious effects on general health include:
  - **Cancer:** Cancers linked to smoking include cancers of the mouth, throat, lungs, pancreas, bladder and kidney. Women who smoke are also at risk of having breast cancer at an earlier age and much higher risk for developing cervical and vulvar cancer.
  - **Lung disease:** Smoking can lead to chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases (COPD) such as emphysema, bronchitis and asthmatic bronchitis.
  - **Heart disease and stroke:** Women who smoke are at increased risk for both stroke and cardiovascular disease, including high blood pressure and heart attack. Using oral contraceptives (birth control pills) can increase the negative cardiovascular effects of smoking by increasing risk of having a heart attack, a stroke, or blood clots.
- Tobacco use can affect your bladder health. Urinary urgency (the need to pee suddenly) and frequency (the need to pee more often than usual) is more common in women who smoke.



## Tobacco and Pregnancy

- There is no known safe level of tobacco use for anyone including pregnant women.
- When a woman smokes or uses tobacco during pregnancy, the nicotine, carbon monoxide and other chemicals that enter her blood stream pass into the fetus. This keeps the baby from getting the food and oxygen it needs to grow.
- Tobacco use during pregnancy can have life-long effects on your baby, including learning difficulties, behavior issues and increased chance of certain birth defects such as cleft lip or cleft palate.
- Smoking during pregnancy also increases the risks of premature birth, stillbirth and having a low-birth-weight baby. Pre term and low birth weight babies are more likely to have health problems or disabilities as they grow. Children of women who smoke during pregnancy are more likely to develop nicotine dependency later in life.
- Quitting smoking early in pregnancy can improve your health and reduce many of these risks. If you have problems stopping or reducing your tobacco use while pregnant, talk to your health care provider about support and services in your community that can help you.
- Nicotine replacement therapy (e.g., nicotine patch or gum) or medications can be helpful for some pregnant women who are having difficulty quitting. There is very little research on the safety and effectiveness of using electronic cigarettes to quit smoking during pregnancy. Talk to your health care provider if you have questions about quit smoking aids.

## Quitting Smoking and Other Tobacco Use

- Quitting smoking can be hard but it has benefits that begin right away and last forever. Within hours your blood pressure goes down, your blood circulation improves, you reduce your chance of a heart attack, your breathing improves, and you have increased energy.
- There are many ways to quit smoking. Some people quit all at once, while other others quit gradually. Some people need a lot of help, but most need none.
  - You can get support from a counselor, a quit smoking group or online/text messaging programs.
  - Talk to your health care provider if you are interested in nicotine replacement therapy (e.g., the nicotine patch or gum) or medications to help with quitting smoking (e.g., bupropion, varenicline).
  - Don't be discouraged if you've tried quitting before. You learn something new each time you try to quit smoking and what didn't work in the past might work now.
- Stopping smoking can prevent or reduce many of the negative effects of tobacco use and can add years to your life. It's never too late to cut back or stop smoking.
- **Withdrawal:** Symptoms of nicotine withdrawal include irritability, restlessness, anxiety, insomnia and fatigue. While these symptoms will go away within a couple of weeks, some people may be unable to concentrate, and have strong cravings to smoke, for weeks or months after quitting smoking or using other forms of tobacco. You may have to change your routines while you withdraw in order to stay on track.

## Tobacco and Breastfeeding

- It is best not to use tobacco while breastfeeding as nicotine passes to the baby through breast milk.
- The potential long-term effects on babies exposed to nicotine through breast milk are not known.
- If you are using tobacco and breastfeeding:
  - Avoid smoking or using tobacco just before or during breastfeeding
  - Change your clothes before breastfeeding if you have smoked
  - Wash your hands before breastfeeding
  - Cut back on how much you smoke or use tobacco
  - Avoid smoking around the baby.
- Nicotine replacement therapy (e.g., the nicotine patch or gum) can be used while breastfeeding to help you quit. Talk to your health care provider about these options.

## Tobacco, Parenting and Children

- If you smoke, try to smoke away from your children, outside of your home and car. Smoking in cars with children present is illegal in most provinces.
- Second-hand smoke can affect both your health and the health of your children.
- Being close to secondhand smoke, even for a short time can irritate your eyes, nose and throat. It can also cause headaches, dizziness, nausea, coughing and wheezing. Secondhand smoke can also make allergy or asthma symptoms worse.
- For babies and children, second-hand smoke increases the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). SIDS is the death of a child under the age of 1 for which no reason can be found.
- Second-hand smoke also increases the chances that children will have ear infections, asthma, allergies, and respiratory illnesses (e.g., bronchitis, pneumonia).

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This resource was developed through the support of the Education and Training Council, Alberta FASD Cross Ministry Committee (<http://fasd.alberta.ca>) and reviewed by experts from the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse ([www.ccsa.ca](http://www.ccsa.ca)) and the Canada FASD Research Network ([www.canfasd.ca](http://www.canfasd.ca)).

**Updated: July 2015**