

SMOKING IN PREGNANCY





SMOKING IN PREGNANCY

Created by students in the Entry-to-
Practice Doctor of Pharmacy
Program at the University of British
Columbia

In collaboration with Lori Bonertz
(BSc Pharm)

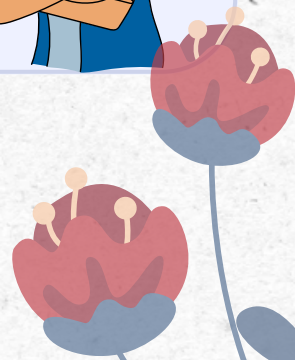
Created August 2025

NOTE:

The following information was created by UBC pharmacy students. Only general information is provided on this topic, and it is subject to change. Please consult with your pharmacist or health care provider for client-specific questions.

Table of Contents

- **Page 1:** Understanding Smoking
- **Page 2:** How Smoking Affects You and Your Baby
- **Page 3:** What You Can Do to Quit and Safer Alternatives
- **Page 4:** BC Smoking Cessation Program and Support during pregnancy
- **Page 5:** Resources That Can Help Throughout Your Quit Journey
- **Page 6:** References



Understanding smoking

What is addiction?



- **Cigarettes contain nicotine**,
 - The main factor that drives addiction.
- Nicotine **stimulates the release of specific chemicals in the brain** that make you feel good.
- Long-term use of cigarettes can **alter portions of the brain** and cause you to become dependent on nicotine
- **Quitting can be challenging** because the brain is used to having a constant supply of nicotine
- **Reducing the supply of nicotine** can cause individuals to experience **symptoms of withdrawal**,
 - including irritability, anxiety, difficulty concentrating and sleeping.



Why quit during pregnancy?

- Smoking during pregnancy is one of the **biggest preventable causes of health problems and death** for babies both before and after birth.



Immediate and long-term health benefits of quitting

- The risk of a **heart attack** begins to **lessen after 48 hours**.
 - After 1 year, your risk is 50% less, and after 5 years, it is 100% less
- **Breathing** becomes **easier within days**
- **Wound healing** is **improved**, reducing complications of surgery and hospitalization
- The risk of **developing cancer** is **decreased**
- The risk of **lung cancer** is **reduced by 50% within 10 years**
- **Quitting** smoking **earlier** in pregnancy **increases** your chances of staying **smoke-free in the long term**



How Smoking Affects You and Your Baby

Adverse Effects of Smoking on a Mother's Health

- Increases your risk of having a **heart attack, stroke and high blood pressure**
- Increases chance of experiencing a **sudden heart-related death**
- Increases your risk of developing **chronic obstructive pulmonary disease** and **sinus infections**
- Increases your risk of lung complications, such as **pneumonia**
- Increases your risk of developing **cancers** (breast, cervical, and lung cancers)
- **Weakens your bones** and increases your risk of developing osteoporosis
- **Weakens your immune system**, making it harder to fight off disease
- Can make it **more challenging to get pregnant** and can increase your risk of experiencing an **ectopic pregnancy**
- May **cause problems during childbirth**, like heavy bleeding
- **Delays wound healing** after a C-section



Effects During Fetal and Newborn Stages

- **Miscarriage risk increases** by 25%
- Premature births
 - **15% of premature births are associated with smoking**
- **Low birth weight**
 - Can increase the risk of future illness and premature death
- **Stillbirth**
 - Risk increased by 40%
- Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)
 - **Parental smoking causes 24% of SIDS worldwide**



Long-Term Effects on Child

- Reduction in organ size and function
- **Behavioural disorders**
 - Attention-deficit disorders, intellectual disability
- **Respiratory problems**
- Childhood **cancers**
- Increases the **risk of obesity**
- **Nicotine dependence**
- **Increases the risk of cross-eyes** (strabismus)



What you can do to quit

Plan 1: quit with a friend's help

- Tell a **non-smoking friend** you would like to quit and **ask for their support**
- Let your friend know anytime you are having a craving or feeling demotivated so they can help you work through it
- **Start a new hobby** with your friend to distract from cravings



Plan 2: slowly try to cut back before fully quitting

- **Start keeping track** of your cigarettes on week 1
- In the following weeks, aim to **smoke fewer cigarettes compared to week 1**
- After week 3:
 - Decide if you are ready to **completely quit** or
 - Continue **reducing the amount of cigarettes**

Plan 3: aim to quit by a specific date

- Start by **choosing the date**
- Get ready by **finding your reasons** to quit, and what are your triggers



Safer alternatives:

Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT)

- NRT is a **less harmful way** to get nicotine compared to smoking cigarettes
 - **Cigarette smoke** exposes you and your baby to **4000 chemicals**, including nicotine
- **NRT can help** highly nicotine-dependent mothers who are motivated to quit by
 - **Reducing** nicotine **withdrawal symptoms** while quitting
 - **Helping** to **identify/change habits and triggers** that make you want to smoke

Safer alternatives:

what's ok to use?

- In pregnancy, an immediate release form of NRT including **gum, lozenges, and inhalers, are preferred** over a continuous release form like patches
- **Use the smallest amount** that works for you for the shortest time needed to limit your baby's nicotine exposure
- **Consult with your pharmacist** for your personalized recommendation



Free Quit Support in Pregnancy



BC Smoking Cessation Program



Free Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT)

BC residents can get free help to quit smoking through PharmaCare's Smoking Cessation Program. You may be eligible for:

- **Up to 12 weeks of free Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT)** per calendar year:
 - Patches
 - Gum
 - Lozenges
- **Up to 12 weeks of free prescription medication:**
 - Bupropion or varenicline
 - Coverage depends on your PharmaCare plan.
 - In some cases, the benefits of using medication to quit smoking may outweigh the risks in pregnancy.

Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about whether NRT or medication may be the safer option for you and your baby.

How Do I Access These Supports?

Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT)

- Bring your **BC Services Card (MSP)** to any community pharmacy.
- Your pharmacist will help you complete a declaration and notification form on-site.
- No prescription is required.
- You will receive up to three 28-day supplies of your chosen NRT product within an 84-day period.

Prescription Medications

- Speak with a doctor or pharmacist to assess your eligibility and get a prescription for **bupropion or varenicline**.
- The prescription must indicate **"smoking cessation"** and be filled in **28-day intervals**.
- Coverage depends on your PharmaCare plan (e.g., Fair PharmaCare, Plan C, Plan G, or Plan W).



Support Tailored for Pregnancy

Pregnancy is an important time to consider your health and your baby's well-being. QuitNow BC offers specialized support for individuals who are pregnant, planning a pregnancy, or have recently given birth. Whether you are ready to quit, planning to cut back, or looking for guidance, **QuitNow provides free and confidential services** tailored to your needs.

QuitNow offers the following support for individuals during and after pregnancy:

Get coaching that fits your needs

Speak with a Quit Coach by phone, text, or chat. They can help you build a quit plan, manage cravings and stress. They'll also help you adjust your approach as your needs change.

Access information designed for pregnancy and postpartum

Learn how smoking or vaping affects your baby's growth and your own health. Access tools and tips to reduce risks—even if you're not ready to quit right away.

Find help for your partner and support system

Your loved ones can access guidance on how to support you through the process, create a smoke-free space, and encourage you throughout your progress in ways that feel right for you.

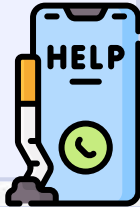


Resources

QuitNow BC

- Free programs that offer **coaching** via live chat/ over the phone/ text and emails/ support peer forum
- Tracks smoking habits and offers a **supportive community** for individuals striving to quit.
- **App version available**

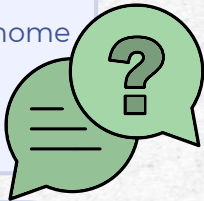
<https://quitnow.ca/>



Talk Tobacco

- Offers coaching/support/ information for **first nations, metis, inuit and urban indigenous individuals**
- Has coaching available via the phone, live chat, text and an online forum

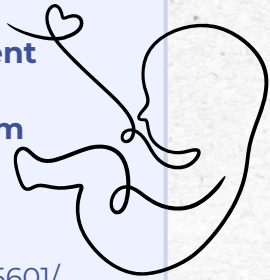
<https://smokershelpline.ca/talktobacco/home>



The alcohol and drug information and referral service

- Provides **free, confidential, multilingual**, information and referral regarding community resources for people in BC dealing with **substance use and addiction** concerns.
- Resource navigators provide information about **detox, counselling, treatment programs, recovery homes, and support groups**.
- Covers education and prevention resources, and other concerns such as **harm reduction** and **fetal alcohol** and **drug effects**.
- **Telephone assistance** is available 9 am to 5 pm Monday to Friday.

<https://bc.211.ca/result/the-alcohol-and-drug-information-and-referral-service-adirs-9505601/>



quitSTART app

- The app helps you get ready to quit with tips and information to prepare you for becoming smoke free
- **Monitor your progress** and earn badges for smoke free milestones and other achievement

Quit Planner

- Answer a series of questions and a **customized quit plan** will be ready to print, save, or copy

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/campaigns/quit-smoking/planner.html>



Tools for Smoke Free Life:

- Learn about others who are on the same journey as you!

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/campaigns/quit-smoking.html>



References

1. Delpisheh A, Brabin L, Brabin BJ. Pregnancy, Smoking and Birth Outcomes. *Women's Health*. 2006 May;2(3):389–403. <https://doi.org/10.2217/17455057.2.3.389>
2. CDC. Why Quitting Smoking Is Hard | Quit Smoking | Tips From Former Smokers | CDC [Internet]. [www.cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/campaign/tips/quit-smoking/quit-smoking-medications/why-quitting-smoking-is-hard/index.html). 2024 [cited 2025 Jul 13]. <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/campaign/tips/quit-smoking/quit-smoking-medications/why-quitting-smoking-is-hard/index.html> (accessed 2025 Jul 13)
3. Health Canada. Tobacco and Pre and Post Natal Risks [Internet]. [www.canada.ca](https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/health-concerns/tobacco/legislation/tobacco-product-labelling/tobacco-pregnancy.html). 2025 [cited 2025 Jul 13]. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/health-concerns/tobacco/legislation/tobacco-product-labelling/tobacco-pregnancy.html> (accessed 2025 Jul 13)
4. Child Health BC, BC Provincial Health officer. PHYSICAL HEALTH & WELL-BEING [Internet]. 2015 [cited 2025 Jul 13].
5. BCRCP. Tobacco Use in the Perinatal Period [Internet]. 2006 Jun [cited 2025 Jul 13] p. 2–19.
6. MotherToBaby | Fact Sheets. Cigarette Smoke [Internet]. PubMed. Brentwood (TN): Organization of Teratology Information Specialists (OTIS); 2024 [cited 2025 Jul 13]. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK582635/> (accessed 2025 Jul 13)
7. Health Canada. I quit for me [Internet]. [www.canada.ca](https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/publications/healthy-living/i-quit-for-me-guide-youth.html). 2024 [cited 2025 Jul 13]. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/publications/healthy-living/i-quit-for-me-guide-youth.html> (accessed 2025 Jul 13)
8. Ministry of Health. BC Smoking Cessation Program - Province of British Columbia [Internet]. [gov.bc.ca](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/health-drug-coverage/pharmacare-for-bc-residents/what-we-cover/bc-smoking-cessation-program). 2025 [cited 2025 Jul 13]. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/health-drug-coverage/pharmacare-for-bc-residents/what-we-cover/bc-smoking-cessation-program> (accessed 2025 Jul 13)
9. QuitNow-NH. Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) - QuitNow New Hampshire [Internet]. QuitNow New Hampshire. 2017 [cited 2025 Jul 13]. <https://quitnownh.org/nicotine-replacement-therapy-nrt/> (accessed 2025 Jul 13)
10. British Columbia Ministry of Health. Tobacco Use Disorder - Diagnosis and Management [Internet]. 2022 [cited 2025 Jul 13]. Available from: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/practitioner-professional-resources/bc-guidelines/tobacco-use-disorder>
11. Association of smoking with wound complications after cesarean delivery [Internet]. U.S. National Library of Medicine; 2012 [cited 2025 Jul 24]. Available from: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22081871/>
12. Murakami K, Ishikuro M, Ueno F, Noda A, Onuma T, Obara T, et al. Factors associated with postpartum smoking relapse among women who quit in early pregnancy: the Tohoku Medical Megabank Project Birth and Three-Generation Cohort Study. *Journal of Epidemiology*. 2021;33(1):8–14. <https://doi.org/10.2188/jea.je20200609>
13. CAO. How smoking when pregnant can harm your baby's vision | Canadian Association of Optometrists [Internet]. [Opto.ca](https://opto.ca/eye-health-library/how-smoking-when-pregnant-can-harm-your-babys-vision). 2023 [cited 2025 Aug 10]. <https://opto.ca/eye-health-library/how-smoking-when-pregnant-can-harm-your-babys-vision>