

**Observer Magazine: Life NUTRITION: NUTRITION NEWS
BY DR JOHN BRIFFA
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Many mothers-to-be will be aware that smoking and alcohol are best avoided during pregnancy. Evidence suggests that coffee should also be added to this list. Hefty intakes of caffeine during pregnancy (equivalent to five to eight cups of coffee a day) have been associated with tremors and heart-rhythm irregularities in newborn babies.

Also, in a study published recently in the British Medical Journal , drinking four to seven cups of coffee a day was found to be associated with a 40 per cent increase in the risk of stillbirth. Drinking eight or more cups of coffee a day appeared to more than double the risk. However, while this study showed that quite a lot of coffee may increase the risk of stillbirth, a small amount appeared to have the opposite effect: women drinking one to three cups of coffee a day were actually 40 per cent less likely to suffer a stillbirth compared to women drinking no coffee at all. All things considered, the current evidence suggests that drinking a cup or two of coffee each day is generally safe for expectant mums and their babies. ---

Cigarette smoking during pregnancy can cause serious health problems to an unborn child. Smoking during pregnancy has been linked to premature labour, breathing problems and fatal illness among infants.



In a recent study, an estimated 440,000 Americans die each year from diseases caused by smoking. Smoking is responsible for an estimated one in five U.S. deaths and costs the U.S. at least \$150 billion each year in health care costs and lost productivity. The UK follows similarly with figures with over 120,000 deaths per year.

Facts about Smoking and Pregnancy

- ❑ Smoking during pregnancy is estimated to account for 20 to 30 percent of low-birth weight babies, up to 14 percent of preterm deliveries, and some 10 percent of all infant deaths. The odds of developing asthma are twice as high among children whose mothers smoke more than 10 cigarettes a day. Between 400,000 and 1 million asthmatic children have their condition worsened by exposure to passive smoke.
- ❑ Maternal smoking during and after pregnancy has been linked to asthma among infants and young children.
- ❑ In 1999, 12.3 percent of mothers were reported to have smoked during pregnancy, a 30 percent decline from the 1990 level.
- ❑ Smokers inhale nicotine and carbon monoxide, which reach the baby through the placenta and prevent the foetus from getting the nutrients and oxygen needed to grow. Passive smoke also adds a risk to pregnancy. Breast milk often contains whatever is in the woman's body. If the woman smokes, the baby ingests the nicotine in her breast milk.



□ Reducing frequency of smoking may not benefit the baby. A pregnant woman who reduces her smoking pattern or switches to lower tar cigarettes may inhale more deeply or take more puffs to get the same amount of nicotine as before.

□ The most effective way to protect the foetus is to quit smoking. *If a woman plans to conceive a child in the near future, quitting is essential.* A woman who quits within the first three or four months of pregnancy can lower the chances of her baby being born premature or with health problems related to smoking.

□ Pregnancy is a great time for a woman to quit. No matter how long she has been smoking, her body benefits from her quitting because it lessens her chances of developing future tobacco-related health problems, such as lung and heart disease, and cancer.

To Quit Smoking in One Hour call Futuremind on **0800 093 1440**

