

Pregnancy and asthma

Asthma changes during pregnancy

Many women find their asthma changes during pregnancy. This can be due to a range of factors such as changes in the immune system and allergic rhinitis (hay fever). Whether your asthma is better or worse, good asthma control when you are pregnant is vital for the best possible health for you and your baby.

Do not stop taking your asthma medications

Keep taking your medications as prescribed. Stopping your medications can put your baby at risk. You're breathing for your baby too, so well controlled asthma means your baby will have a good oxygen supply for normal growth and development, preventing low birth weight and premature delivery.

Asthma medications

Medications for asthma have been shown to be very safe for both mother and baby. It is more dangerous to have untreated asthma during pregnancy than to continue with your prescribed asthma medications.

Ask your doctor, pharmacist or asthma educator about the role of your medications so you understand how they work and why you should take them.

Ask your doctor for a written asthma action plan with instructions on when and how to use each medication. An asthma action plan also helps you recognise when your asthma is getting worse and tells you what to do in response. Treating a mild symptom flare-up can help prevent it developing into a severe asthma attack.

Before pregnancy

If you are planning a pregnancy, this is a good time to speak with your doctor about your asthma. Together you can make sure your asthma is under the best possible control and that you are on the safest types of medications for you and your baby.



It's also a great time for you and/or your partner to give up smoking. Smoking or breathing in second-hand smoke during pregnancy can affect the development of your baby's lungs and can increase the risk of your child developing asthma. You don't have to do it alone – your doctor, pharmacist or asthma educator can help.

If you are planning to have a baby, try to have your routine vaccinations up to date before you become pregnant.

During pregnancy

Keep taking all your asthma medications and see your doctor for regular asthma check-ups. Make sure your healthcare team (GP, obstetrician, midwife) know you have asthma and how you manage it. Work with your doctor to develop an asthma action plan for during your pregnancy. Avoid smoking and breathing other people's tobacco smoke. Always act quickly if your asthma symptoms flare up – follow your asthma action plan.

Vaccination during pregnancy

Vaccinations for influenza (flu), whooping cough (pertussis) and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) are free during pregnancy through the National Immunisation Program.

Vaccination for whooping cough, the flu and RSV during pregnancy is recommended to protect your newborn baby. When you are vaccinated, your antibodies transfer from your placenta to your developing baby.

The influenza vaccine can also protect you from becoming unwell during your pregnancy. During pregnancy, the immune system is naturally weakened, so you are at greater risk of the flu. Flu is a common trigger for asthma along with other respiratory viruses.

COVID-19 vaccines can also be given while you are pregnant if your health professional recommends it.

Hay fever and pregnancy

Hay fever can affect more than 1 in 3 women during pregnancy. Hay fever due to allergies is a common trigger of asthma. It is important to keep taking your hay fever medications as prescribed by your doctor.

Many hay fever medications including some nasal corticosteroid sprays and oral (tablet) antihistamines are considered safe to use in pregnancy. Decongestant nasal sprays or tablets should not be used during pregnancy and breastfeeding. If you are taking medication for hay fever, check with your GP or pharmacist to ensure they are safe to take during pregnancy or breastfeeding.

Giving birth

Asthma attacks rarely happen during labour. Any symptoms that do occur can usually be managed according to your asthma action plan. Like other women, most women with asthma can expect a normal vaginal delivery.

After your baby is born

Keep taking your prescribed asthma medications, even while breastfeeding. Make sure you see your doctor for regular asthma reviews. If your asthma was worse while you were pregnant, with good management it usually returns to normal within a few months of your baby being born.

In summary

- Make good asthma control during pregnancy a high priority, to protect your baby and yourself.
- Keep taking all your medications as prescribed by your doctor.
- Ensure you have an up to date asthma action plan.
- Speak to your doctor about maternal vaccinations and ensure your vaccinations are up to date.
- Have regular planned asthma reviews during your pregnancy.

Further information

- Quitting smoking: quit.org.au/articles/how-to-quit-when-pregnant
- Immunisation for pregnancy: health.gov.au/topics/immunisation/when-to-get-vaccinated/immunisation-for-pregnancy
- Asthma and the flu: nationalasthma.org.au/living-with-asthma/resources/patients-carers/factsheets/influenza-the-flu
- Asthma in pregnancy toolkit: asthmapregnancytoolkit.org.au/fact-sheets-resources/

Download asthma action plans



Download an allergy action plan

