

# Pregnancy and nicotine replacement therapy (NRT)

What you need  
to know



Pregnancy is a great opportunity to stop smoking. Avoiding tobacco is the most important thing a woman can do to improve her health and that of her unborn baby.

Lots of women cut down on cigarettes when they find out they are pregnant. Although this is a great achievement, it is strongly recommended that pregnant women quit smoking completely to enjoy the health benefits for themselves and their unborn babies.

In studies, the levels of carbon monoxide (CO) in women who said they had reduced their smoking during pregnancy showed they had not necessarily reduced their exposure to toxins. Additional evidence highlights the importance for a pregnant woman to quit smoking altogether rather than just cutting down.



Firstly, children are more likely to take up smoking if their parents smoke. Furthermore, research highlights the possible damage - to both mother and child - caused by exposure to second-hand smoke.

Ideally you should try to give up smoking without the use of nicotine replacement therapy (NRT). If you can't manage this, talk to your GP or midwife about licensed NRT. A short course of licensed NRT is safer for you and your baby than continuing to smoke.

Because cigarettes expose the mother and baby to nicotine and many other toxins (4,000 in total) smoking is far more hazardous than nicotine obtained from an alternative, regulated and cleaner source such as licensed NRT products.

Nicotine addiction is one of the major reasons why people continue to smoke cigarettes. If you would like support during your quit attempt, ask your GP or pharmacist about specialist stop smoking services, which will increase your chances of quitting.

## What else can you do?

Attending a support group for stopping smoking or getting support from your midwife, partner, family, friends, GP or pharmacist and having a smoke-free house can help.

## Licensed NRT available for pregnant mums

With medical advice, these licensed NRT products can be used in pregnancy.

### **Nicotine gum**

When you chew nicotine gum, the nicotine is absorbed through the lining of your mouth.

### **Nicotine patches**

Nicotine patches are not ideal for pregnant women as they deliver a stronger flow of nicotine. If you do choose patches, only use them during the day.

### **Microtabs**

These are small nicotine tablets that dissolve quickly under your tongue.

### **Lozenges (not liquorice flavour)**

Lozenges are sucked slowly to release the nicotine and take about 20-30 minutes to dissolve.

### **Inhalators**

Inhalators look like a plastic cigarette. They release nicotine vapour, which is absorbed through your mouth and throat. If you miss the 'hand to mouth' aspect of smoking, these may suit you.

### **Nasal spray**

The nasal spray delivers a swift dose of nicotine that is absorbed through the lining of your nose.



## **Mouth spray**

The mouth spray delivers a quick dose of nicotine that is absorbed through the lining of your mouth.

## **Oral strips**

These dissolve on your tongue and release nicotine fast, with a fresh, minty flavour. They fully dissolve in approximately three minutes. Recommended for light smokers.

**Pregnant women are advised to avoid liquorice flavoured NRT products. Although there is no known risk from small amounts of liquorice flavouring, the manufacturers advise caution. This is based on information on the adverse effects associated with excessive amounts of liquorice root.**

**If you decide to use licensed NRT, try intermittent oral forms of NRT first, like gum or lozenges. If you experience pregnancy-related nausea and vomiting with these, you could try patches instead, as some products work well for some people but not others. You are advised to avoid trying patches first as they provide a constant delivery of nicotine into your body and they should never be used when sleeping. If you try various forms of licensed NRT and continue to experience nausea and vomiting, stop using NRT products and ask a health professional for advice.**

Licensed NRT is available on prescription from your GP. Many GP practices, pharmacies, Health and Social Care Trusts, community and voluntary organisations, and workplace stop smoking services provide a service where licensed NRT can be supplied if appropriate. Visit [www.want2stop.info](http://www.want2stop.info) and click on the stop smoking services page to find your local stop smoking service providers.

## **What about e-cigarettes?**

For up-to-date information on e-cigarettes, please visit [www.want2stop.info](http://www.want2stop.info) or speak to your stop smoking service provider.

## Risks from smoking

Smoking presents significant health risks, particularly to the unborn baby. Any risks associated with licensed NRT are likely to be small.

No drug (nicotine is a drug) is 100% safe during pregnancy. Licensed NRT is much safer and much less addictive than cigarettes. The levels of nicotine delivered by licensed NRT are typically lower than those delivered by cigarettes. Licensed NRT also doesn't contain the tar and carbon monoxide found in cigarettes.

If you are pregnant, you will be offered support to stop smoking. A member of staff involved in your antenatal care can refer you to the specialist stop smoking service.

## Help yourself

When you are tempted to smoke, try one of the four Ds:

**Delay** acting on the urge to smoke.

**Deep** breaths.

**Drink** water.

**Do** something else.



## Stop smoking service providers

### Belfast area

Fiona McCambridge  
Smoking Cessation Midwife  
Mob: 079 1934 7563

### Southern area

#### Daisy Hill Hospital

Ursula Gaffney  
Mob: 077 9544 5710  
Email: ursula.gaffney@shsct.hscni.net

#### Craigavon Area Hospital

Roisin Donohue  
Mob: 077 9544 5918  
Email: roisin.donohue@shsct.hscni.net

## Northern area

### Causeway Area Hospital

Annette Barclay  
Smoking Cessation Midwife  
Mob: 075 8402 3601  
Email: annette.barclay@northerntrust.hscni.net

### Mid-Ulster Hospital

Kerry Bate  
Smoking Cessation Midwife  
Tel: 028 7936 6799  
Mob: 077 8222 2997  
Email: kerry.bate@northerntrust.hscni.net

### Antrim Area Hospital

Sonia Shirlow  
Mob: 078 2733 4605  
Email: sonia.shirlow@northerntrust.hscni.net

### Carrick Health Centre

Andrea Howard  
Mob: 078 8764 7915  
Email: andrea.howard@northerntrust.hscni.net

## South Eastern area

Cathy Bell  
Tel: 028 9250 1376  
Email: cathy.bell@setrust.hscni.net

## Western area

The Western Health and Social Care Trust specialist stop smoking team provides services to pregnant women in both hospital and community settings. The Trust's smoke-free helpline is available 9am–5pm, Monday to Friday, on 0800 917 9388.

Text 'Quit' to 70004  
for stop smoking SMS  
text support.



You can also  
follow Want2stop  
on Facebook.



## Acknowledgement

This leaflet has been adapted with the permission of Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.



### Public Health Agency

12-22 Linenhall Street, Belfast BT2 8BS.  
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www.publichealth.hscni.net

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