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Asthma SA Urges New Parents to give children the Right Start

Demographic studies suggest this is the time of year when many Australians receive the happy news that they're going to be parents. The Asthma Foundation of SA is urging the 1 in 10 women who live with asthma to give themselves and their babies the best possible start by ensuring they have good asthma control and follow the correct advice during pregnancy.

Women with asthma should manage their condition as they did before pregnancy. Many stop taking their preventer medications during pregnancy, which increases the risk of poor health outcomes for themselves and their babies, such as low birth weight and preterm delivery – serious complications that can affect the survival and long term health of the baby.

“About half of Australian women with asthma will experience a temporary worsening of their asthma whilst pregnant with some needing urgent medical care, especially between 17 and 36 weeks”, said Associate Professor Vicki Clifton, Asthma Foundation of SA Director and NHMRC Senior Research Fellow and Director of Clinical Research at the Lyell McEwin Hospital.

“Many women stop taking their asthma medications during pregnancy because they're concerned about possible side effects, but the risks associated with stopping your medication far outweigh any impact that it may have on your baby.”

“It is important to monitor asthma symptoms, use a written Asthma Action Plan and see a doctor if asthma symptoms worsen during pregnancy. Women should arrange to have their asthma control reviewed every 4-6 weeks.”

Tracey Clark knows the risks only too well. During her pregnancy she became short of breath a lot quicker.

“Prior to being pregnant, I used to be rather slack at remembering my preventers but when I became responsible for a little being growing inside of me, I became more vigilant.”

“I'm so thankful I read the Asthma Foundation of SA brochure and discovered that asthma symptoms can worsen during pregnancy and what I could do about it. Thanks to that I was able to control my asthma during pregnancy,” said Mrs Clark.

Research has revealed that more women with asthma smoke, compared to women without asthma.

“The harm that can be caused by smoking during pregnancy is well-documented, but for women with asthma and their baby the risks are much greater,” said Associate Professor Clifton.

“Numerous studies have concluded that babies born to mothers who smoked during their pregnancy significantly increased the risk of giving birth to a child with asthma.”

“Pregnant women who are still smoking should talk to their health care practitioner about getting help to quit.”

“Prospective mothers should also avoid exposure to tobacco smoke. It can trigger an asthma attack and the link between second hand smoke and an increased probability of having a child with asthma is well-established.”

Recent research concerning the use of folic acid supplements also prompted the Asthma Foundation of SA to offer new advice. Taking a folic acid supplement is recommended for women who intend to fall pregnant, as it is known to prevent neural tube defects during a foetus’ critical first weeks in the womb, but a recent Australian study found pregnant women who over-use the supplement beyond the first trimester were 30% more likely to have a child with asthma.

“The study showed that those women who took the supplement throughout their pregnancy, or from 16 to 30 weeks, significantly increased the risk of having a child with asthma.”

“However eating a diet naturally rich in green leafy vegetables, certain nuts and fruits, known to be sources of folate (the natural form of folic acid), was not found to carry an asthma risk.”

Tips for asthma and pregnancy:

- Keep taking all your asthma medications to reduce the risk of an asthma attack.
- See your doctor to ensure you are on the lowest dose necessary to control your asthma.
- Have regular check-ups every 4-6 weeks to ensure you have good asthma control.
- Work with your doctor to keep your written Asthma Action Plan up to date, follow it closely and tell your doctor if your asthma symptoms worsen.
- Avoid known triggers and anything that makes your asthma worse.
- Avoid smoking and breathing in other people's tobacco smoke as this increases the risk of your baby developing asthma, respiratory infections and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).
- If you're pregnant and still taking folic acid supplements after 16 weeks, consult your GP.

Need help controlling your asthma? Seek information and register for a FREE Asthma Control Pack by visiting www.asthmasa.org.au or calling the Breathe Better Information Line on 1800 645 130.

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