What You Need to Know About Coping With Asthma During Pregnancy

by BRENDA VANTA

Asthma and Pregnancy

Do you suffer from asthma and worry how this condition could affect you and your baby during the pregnancy? First of all, you are not alone. As many as 8% of pregnant women also have asthma. Like most women in this situation, you could, too have the symptoms controlled, experience a normal pregnancy and deliver a healthy baby - if you get the right treatment and avoid triggers.

Does Asthma Aggravates During Pregnancy?

In most cases, no. About one third of the women will experience symptom improvement, one third will be stable during pregnancy, and the remaining third may suffer aggravation of asthma. Doctors observed that if the symptoms worsen, they usually do between weeks 17 and 24 of pregnancy. This may happen due to the fact that some women would find at this time that they are pregnant and stop taking the medication. Changing the medication plan without medical advice is a wrong decision, as a poor managed asthma is more dangerous to the mother and baby compared with the risk of taking the medication. Asthma usually does not worsen during labor or when you deliver the baby.

Any Possible Complications During Pregnancy?

Most women with asthma will not have complications during pregnancy. Compared with women without asthma, there is a slight increased risk to experience high blood pressure (or preeclampsia), the need to deliver through C -section, or the baby to be premature or small for his age. The risk of these complications can be reduced if you have manage well your symptoms.

Asthma Treatment and Monitoring During Pregnancy

The treatment is similar to the one you received before getting pregnant, being based on the severity of symptoms. Your asthma specialist will work with your obstetrician not only for the treatment, but also to monitor your condition and the well being of your baby. The lung function will be tested regularly, either in the hospital or at home (with the peak flow meter). Your baby’s health is also assessed with tests such as non-stress testing and ultrasounds.

Tips to Manage Symptoms and Prevent Attacks

If you are not pregnant yet, schedule a preconception appointment with your doctor. He will evaluate whether or not you need some changes in your treatment plan to have your condition well managed. Talk to your doctor about any concerns because the more you are informed, the less anxious or stressed you will feel.

The quality of the air you breathe is important to avoid an asthma attack. Do not smoke, and avoid second hand smoking, strong perfumes and other possible allergens (pet dander, dust, air pollutants). It’s worth buying special covers for mattress and pillows to decrease the exposure to dust mites.

If you suffer from acid reflux, get treatment promptly, because it can aggravate your asthma. You should also keep your head elevated in bed, eat smaller and more frequent meals and avoid foods that cause heartburn (coffee, spicy foods).

If you experience symptom aggravation (i.e. breathing problems, wheezing, coughing, chest tightness) see your doctor as soon as possible.

Breastfeeding is encouraged as the babies who are breastfed are less likely to have wheezing during the first years of their lives, develop respiratory infections; breastfeeding possibly reducing the risk of developing asthma later on in life as well.