



Healthcare
Improvement
Scotland

SIGN

Evidence-based
clinical guidelines

Asthma in pregnancy

A booklet for women, partners, friends, family members and carers

Area for cover image

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank everyone who contributed to this booklet.

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First published 2017

Revised 2025

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www.healthcareimprovementscotland.org

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What is this booklet about?

This booklet explains the recommendations in guidelines produced by the British Thoracic Society (BTS), the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and the Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (SIGN). It gives you information about the care that you are likely to get and can expect.

Recommendations in the guideline are based on different types of evidence. Some of it comes from current research, some from the clinical experience and opinions of healthcare professionals, and some from people with lived experience.

There are two different types of recommendations in the booklet



**Recommendation
based on the research evidence**



**Recommendation
based on clinical experience**

If you would like to see the full plain language version of the guideline about asthma, you can visit our [website](#).

What if I have asthma and I'm pregnant?

If you become pregnant or are planning to try for a baby, you should discuss your asthma with your doctor or nurse.



Recommendation based on the research evidence

You should keep taking all your asthma medicines and your doctor will reassure you it's safe to do so.



Recommendation based on the research evidence

Your baby needs a good supply of oxygen. It's important to keep good control of your asthma so you can breathe freely during your pregnancy. This means taking your medicines as prescribed and visiting your doctor regularly so they can monitor your symptoms and adjust your medicines if necessary.



Recommendation based on the clinical experience

If you have asthma symptoms all the time, you should be seen by a respiratory doctor (a doctor who specialises in breathing-related conditions) as well as an obstetrician (a doctor who specialises in caring for women who are pregnant). They will help you control your asthma.

Smoking and vaping

Women who smoke during pregnancy are more likely to have babies who have breathing problems, including asthma. Children whose parents smoke are 1.5 times more likely to have asthma.

Smoking while pregnant also has other harmful effects; for example, you're more likely to have a miscarriage or a premature baby.

While vaping is thought to be less harmful to health than regular cigarettes, more research is needed into the impact of vaping during pregnancy.



Recommendation based on the research evidence

We know that quitting smoking is difficult, so if you're thinking of trying to quit, speak to your doctor, nurse, midwife or pharmacist who can help support you. You can also visit this [website](#).

Diet



Not enough evidence to tell us if something is of benefit

There is not enough evidence to suggest taking dietary supplements while you are pregnant can prevent your child developing asthma.



Recommendation based on the research evidence

Avoiding certain foods during pregnancy and breastfeeding has not been shown to prevent your child developing asthma.

Is it safe to take asthma medicines while I'm pregnant?



Recommendation based on the research evidence

It's safe to take medicines used to treat asthma while you are pregnant. It's really important for you and your baby's health that you continue to take your medicines as prescribed, so that your asthma is controlled. You may be given the following medicines while you are pregnant:

- A preventer inhaler
- A reliever inhaler
- A single inhaler that acts as a preventer and a reliever
- Theophylline (a medicine that is given in tablet form or through a drip to relax your airways)
- Steroid tablets
- Leukotriene receptor antagonist tablets
- Injections of monoclonal antibodies, often called 'biologics'

It is important to discuss your medication with your midwife, particularly if you are taking 'biologics'.



"Knowing that I could continue to take my inhalers as usual helped me feel more relaxed during my pregnancy." **Fiona**

What will happen if I have an asthma attack when I'm pregnant?



Having an asthma attack when you're pregnant is an emergency. If you're having an asthma attack, dial 999 or 112.



Recommendation based on the research evidence

If you have to go to hospital because of an asthma attack, you will be given the same medicines as if you were not pregnant. You may also be given oxygen and your baby's heart rate will be monitored.



Recommendation based on the research evidence

If you have an asthma attack and need to go to hospital, you will be seen regularly by a hospital respiratory doctor and an obstetrician for the rest of your pregnancy. They will help you control your asthma during your pregnancy. It's important to attend the follow up appointments with both the respiratory doctor, and obstetrician.

Is there a risk I will have an asthma attack during labour?

It is very unusual to have an asthma attack during labour. When you're in labour, your body produces natural steroid hormones that help prevent asthma attacks. If you do get asthma symptoms during labour, you can take your normal asthma medicine. You should discuss your asthma medications with your midwife during pregnancy so that the labour team is aware of them.



Recommendation based on the clinical experience

If you're taking more than 5 mg a day of the steroid called prednisolone for four weeks before you go into labour, you will be given a drip or injection of hydrocortisone every six to eight hours during labour.

Consultation draft

Breastfeeding



Recommendation based on the research evidence

All women are encouraged to breastfeed their babies because of its many benefits. Breast milk may reduce the chances of your child developing asthma.



Recommendation based on the research evidence

You should still take your asthma medicines when you are breastfeeding as they will not harm your baby, and keep your asthma controlled.



“It was good to know that having asthma would not affect my ability to breastfeed.” **Nicola**

Immunisations



Recommendation based on the research evidence

Immunisations are the vaccinations your child will be given by a doctor or nurse as they are growing up.

It's important that your child has vaccinations to help protect them against infectious diseases. There is no evidence that vaccinations increase the risk of your child getting asthma.



Information

You can find out more about asthma and pregnancy from [Asthma and Lung UK](#).

Where can I find out more?

National organisations for people who have asthma

Allergy UK

Helpline: **01322 619898**

Website: www.allergyuk.org

Allergy UK is a charity that aims to increase people's understanding and awareness of allergies, and helps them manage their allergies.

Asthma and Allergy Foundation

Helpline: **01224 973001**

Website: www.asthmaandallergy.org.uk

The Asthma and Allergy Foundation, established in 2009, is Scotland's only dedicated Asthma Charity that provides evidence-based health information, confidential advice and support to people with asthma, their families and carers across Scotland. The organisation also provides asthma awareness training to businesses and healthcare professionals.

Asthma and Lung UK

Helpline: **0300 222 5800**

Website: www.asthmaandlung.org.uk

Asthma + Lung UK believe that every breath matters - and that the right to breathe freely applies to everybody, regardless of income, age, ethnicity, gender or background.

Other organisations

NHS 24

Phone: **111**

Website: www.nhs24.scot

This is a 24-hour helpline for people in Scotland. It's led by nurses who provide confidential healthcare advice and information 24 hours, 365 days a year.

NHS 111

Phone: **111**

This is a 24-hour helpline for people in England and Wales. It's led by nurses who provide confidential healthcare advice and information 24 hours, 365 days a year.

Allergy UK

Helpline: **01322 619898**

Website: www.allergyuk.org

Allergy UK is a charity that aims to increase people's understanding and awareness of allergies, and helps them manage their allergies.

Consultation draft

How are guidelines produced?

Guidelines are produced by looking at the latest scientific research to find the best ways to diagnose, treat and care for people. If the research doesn't provide clear answers, healthcare professionals use their experience and judgement to suggest treatments. This ensures the guidelines are both evidence-based and practical.



1
Gather lived
experience



2
Identify the
questions



3
Search for the
evidence



4
Look at the
evidence



5
Make Judgements
and
recommendations



6
Ask people for
feedback



7
Publish



8
Let everybody
know about our
guidelines