Nicotine Replacement Therapy
Use in Pregnancy and Post-Partum

- Tobacco smoke contains over 4,000 chemicals; about 50 of these are known to cause cancer.
- Nicotine is the addictive substance but it is the other chemicals in the tobacco smoke that cause disease and harm to the woman, the fetus and the baby.
  - Carbon monoxide is of particular concern – it increases the risk of stillbirths and neurological damage to the fetus
- More research is needed to establish the safety of NRT use in pregnancy.
- However, fetal growth does not appear to be affected by using the nicotine patch during pregnancy.\(^1\)

Here are some questions to ask to help your pregnant client decide whether she should use NRT to quit smoking:
- Has she tried quitting on her own but is still smoking?
- Does she smoke more than 10 cigarettes per day?
- Does she want to try using the patch, gum or inhaler?

If she answers yes to one or more of these questions, discuss the risks and benefits of NRT.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits of using NRT</th>
<th>Risks of using NRT</th>
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<td>Eliminates the other chemicals found in cigarette smoke.</td>
<td>Safety has not been completely established. researchers suggest that nicotine may affect the oxygen delivered to the fetus. however, it is believed that the effects are greatest with faster delivery systems (i.e., smoking is the fastest delivery system of nicotine). therefore, the risks are not as great with the patch, gum or inhaler.(^2)</td>
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<td>Helps with withdrawal and cravings.</td>
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<td>Doubles chances of quitting smoking in the general population.</td>
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<td>Exposes the fetus to lower levels of nicotine by using the patch versus smoking cigarettes.</td>
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**Recommendations**\(^3\)

1. Try quitting using behavioural interventions, such as setting a quit date, reviewing past quit attempts, identifying challenges and planning ahead with coping strategies.
2. Use NRT in combination with behavioural interventions. Treatment should start as early as possible in the pregnancy.
3. Use the lowest effective dose of NRT.
4. Use the patch for 16 hours instead of 24 hours to give the fetus a brief nicotine-free period.
5. For women who are breastfeeding, minimal amounts of nicotine are found in breast milk. It is safe to use NRT while breastfeeding.
6. Breastfeeding is also recommended for women who continue to smoke or relapse as the benefits of breastfeeding are substantial.

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