

[IMAGE]

What Smoking Can Do to Your Baby

During the early stages of pregnancy, separate areas of the face develop individually, then fuse together. If certain areas fail to join properly, the result is a facial deformity known as a cleft. Infants born with a cleft lip have an opening in the upper lip between the mouth and the nose; those born with a cleft palate have an abnormal opening at the back of the mouth, or even complete separation of the roof of the mouth.

Because smoking has been shown to have numerous negative effects on pregnancy, including premature birth and low birth weight, it has been proposed that smoking may contribute to facial deformities such as cleft lip and/or cleft palate. To investigate this hypothesis, detailed information on nearly four million live births was obtained from the National Center for Health Statistics 1996 Natality database. Data gathered included maternal smoking status during pregnancy and infant health status, such as the incidence of cleft lip/palate.

Results: Any amount of cigarette smoking during pregnancy significantly increased the risk of bearing a child with a cleft lip/palate, and increased smoking correlated with increased risk. The authors point out that nearly 14% of mothers surveyed in the study admitted to smoking during pregnancy, emphasizing that this is a significant public health concern for both mother and child.

If you're a smoker and can't seem to quit, talk to your doctor about the most effective methods of breaking the habit once and for all.

Reference:

Chung KC, Kowalski CP, Kim HM, et al. Maternal cigarette smoking during pregnancy and the risk of having a child with a cleft lip/palate. *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery* 2000; Vol. 105, pp485-91.

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