Breathing for Two: A Guide to Asthma During Pregnancy

Breathing for Two
A tiny new life grows inside you. Filled with hopes and dreams for your baby’s healthy future, you watch what you eat and drink. You get lots of rest and exercise.

However, for many pregnant mothers, asthma — one of the most common problems of pregnancy — comes with special challenges.

Asthma can be a life-threatening condition, but you can enjoy a healthy pregnancy and delivery.

The key to remember is you are breathing for two.
☐How does asthma affect pregnancy?
☐How does pregnancy affect asthma?
☐How will asthma and asthma medicines affect your unborn child?

Sharing the Air
Healthy breathing is needed for a healthy pregnancy. Your unborn baby depends on you for a steady supply of fresh air. If you have any of the asthma symptoms below, your baby’s air supply may not be as good as needed:
☐Coughing ○Shortness of breath ○Wheezing ○Gasping for air

Talk to your Obstetrician (OB) and Primary Care Provider (PCP) about these symptoms.
Both your OB and PCP need to be a part of asthma care during pregnancy.

How Pregnancy Affects Asthma
It’s hard to know how pregnancy will affect your asthma. Women find that symptoms improve, get worse, or stay the same during pregnancy.

As pregnancy progresses, there is less room inside your body to take a full, deep breath. Things like climbing stairs may leave you short of breath, but should not make you cough and wheeze.

If you find you are having increased cough or wheeze you should talk to your OB and PCP. You may need to start or increase asthma medicines as directed by your OB and PCP.

How Asthma Affects Pregnancy
Asthma symptoms caused by swollen and tightening airways signal lower breathing levels for both mother and baby.

When Asthma symptoms are not treated, mothers are at a bigger risk of:
☐Pre-eclampsia ○Increased vomiting ○Vaginal bleeding ○Premature labor ○Complicated labor

For the unborn child, poorly controlled asthma symptoms can cause:
☐Slowed growth ○Early birth ○Low birth weight ○Loss of life

This is why it is important to talk with your OB and PCP about your asthma.
Asthma Medications During Pregnancy
Many pregnant women avoid using their asthma medicines, fearing harm may come to their unborn child.

The risks of poorly controlled asthma are greater to you and your unborn baby than the risks of taking asthma medicines as prescribed by your OB and PCP.

Things to know about medicines:
☐ Always have your albuterol (quick relief medicine) with you.
☐ Use your long-term asthma control medicine as prescribed by your OB or PCP.
☐ NEVER use allergy medicines without speaking first to your OB.
☐ Always talk to your OB before using any medicines.

Important Tips to Remember
☐ Learn the name(s) of your medicines.
☐ Use medicines only as directed by your OB.
☐ Never take more or less medicine than prescribed.
☐ Talk to your PCP about any concerns you have about your asthma or your asthma medicines.
☐ Avoid smoking and second-hand smoke.

Pregnancy, Asthma and Exercise
Exercising during pregnancy is good for you and your unborn baby.

If you are pregnant and have asthma, speak to your OB before starting to exercise. You may need to change your exercise routine.

Exercising in certain conditions can cause asthma to flare-up. These include:
☐ Very cold or hot air
☐ Very low or high humidity
☐ Smoky or dusty areas
☐ High ozone or smog alert days
☐ Near automobile exhaust
☐ Days with high pollen count

In some cases, you may have asthma symptoms even when following your OB or PCP’s orders. This is why it is very important to talk to your OB and PCP about your asthma at every visit.

Always have your albuterol (quick-relief) medicine with you when exercising.

Setting Goals for Baby and You
☐ Healthy breathing levels at all times.
☐ No nighttime coughing or wheezing.
☐ No hospital or emergency visits due to asthma symptoms.
☐ Able to exercise, go to work, enjoy hobbies, and take care of your home and family without asthma symptoms.
☐ Healthy indoor air.
☐ Stop smoking.
☐ Using the least amount of medicines required to prevent symptoms.
☐ Delivering a happy, healthy baby!