

# Work & Pregnancy Do Mix...

## PREGNANT AND WORKING



Most women continue to work during their pregnancy, whether they work from home, or travel to a workplace. If you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, this brochure will help you think about how your work may affect your health and the health of your unborn baby.

### Making changes early

An unborn baby develops quickly in the first few months of pregnancy. You can help your baby by planning ahead and making changes before pregnancy, or by making changes as early as possible during your pregnancy.

### For most, it just means a few small changes...

Most pregnant women who work have no problems during their pregnancy. Most jobs do not pose concerns during a pregnancy. A few small changes at work can make a big difference to your comfort and to the health of your unborn baby. Continuing to work while pregnant can provide you with confidence as a productive worker, access to medical benefits, support from co-workers, self-esteem, plus that important pay cheque!

### For some, there are bigger changes...

Some women must stop working or must change to a different type of work during their pregnancy. This can be due to serious risks at work, problems with a previous pregnancy or problems during the current pregnancy.

## STEPS TO A HEALTHY PREGNANCY AT WORK

### 1. Read this brochure

### 2. Talk to your health care provider to:

- Provide you with advice and additional information about your work
- Assess your health and your pregnancy

### 3. Talk to people at work to:

- Find out about possible risks at work
- Find out about special programs, services, leaves and benefits



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Ontario's maternal, newborn and early child development resource centre  
Centre de ressources sur la maternité, les nouveau-nés et le développement des jeunes enfants de l'Ontario



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## Heavy Work

### Health Concerns

Heavy physical work may increase your chances of having problems during your pregnancy. Heavy work includes lifting, pushing, pulling and other tiring work.

### Recommendations

During pregnancy it may be necessary to change what you lift and how you lift it.

- ❖ Avoid heavy lifting, pushing, pulling or carrying.
- ❖ If you must lift, be sure to bend your knees. Keep your back straight.
- ❖ Alternate heavy work with less tiring work.
- ❖ Rest with your feet up, when possible.
- ❖ If necessary, ask for a different type of work.



## Sitting for Long Periods

### Health Concerns

Sitting for long periods of time may cause:

- ❖ Swelling in your legs and feet.
- ❖ Less blood flow to your baby.
- ❖ Muscle strain, especially in your lower back.
- ❖ Tension in your neck and shoulders.

### Recommendations

- ❖ Use a cushion to reduce stress on your lower back while sitting.
- ❖ Keep a low footstool handy and change the position of your feet.
- ❖ Avoid crossing your legs or feet.
- ❖ Rotate sitting and standing tasks. Try standing while you talk on the phone.
- ❖ Stand, stretch or move around whenever possible.
- ❖ Wear loose comfortable clothing.



## Standing for Long Periods

### Health Concerns

Standing for long periods of time can affect the blood flow to your baby.

### Recommendations

- ❖ If possible, avoid standing for long periods of time.
- ❖ Take several short walks during the day.
- ❖ Rest once in a while with your feet up.
- ❖ Rotate tasks (sitting, walking, standing, etc.) whenever possible.
- ❖ Wear comfortable, well-fitted shoes (e.g. running shoes).
- ❖ Ask for a chair or a stool at your workstation.
- ❖ If necessary, ask about the possibility of changing duties.



## Ergonomic Factors



Ergonomics is the study of how people physically interact with their working environment. A well-designed work station can help you avoid strain and fatigue. It can help you work effectively and safely.

Normal weight gain during pregnancy causes a change in your centre of gravity. Pregnancy may affect your balance and the way you stand and sit. Your joints may be loose. Muscles may have to work harder to help you keep a comfortable position. There can also be swelling in the hands, legs or feet.

Strenuous work such as standing for long periods of time, lifting, pushing or pulling may cause your baby to be born too soon or too small. Every pregnancy is different. Ask about what is safe during your pregnancy.

## Physical Factors

### Health Concerns

There are many physical reproductive hazards:

- ❖ Radiation (i.e. x-rays) can cause birth defects and low birth weight.
- ❖ Loud noise may cause preterm labour or hearing loss in your unborn baby.
- ❖ Extreme heat is also hard on you and your baby.

### Recommendations

- ❖ Use safety precautions if working with X-rays.
- ❖ Avoid extended periods of loud noise when possible.
- ❖ Avoid long exposure to very hot temperatures.
- ❖ If you work outside, protect yourself from the sun and heat.
- ❖ Drink enough fluids.
- ❖ If necessary, talk to someone at work about different duties.

## Stress

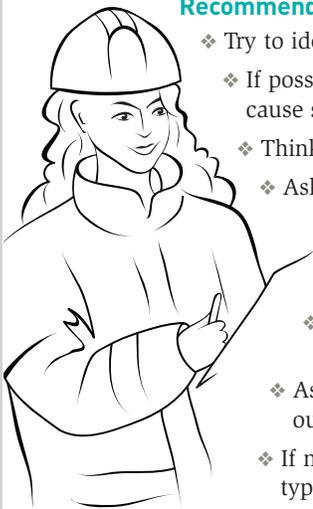
### Health Concerns

Stress can come from many things including concerns about the amount or type of work, the work schedule or commuting. Stress can also come from trying to balance the needs of work and family. Being pregnant can also be a source of worry. High levels of stress can increase the risk of problems during your pregnancy.

Some work schedules are difficult during pregnancy. Long hours (over 40 hours per week), rotating shift work and commuting (over 1 hour per day) may be hard on you and your unborn baby. Work schedules that are tiring can increase the risk of miscarriage and babies being born too soon or too small.

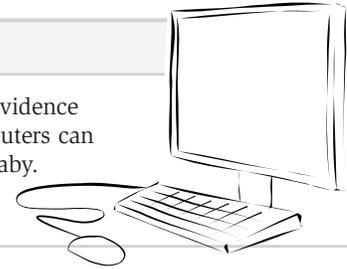
### Recommendations

- ❖ Try to identify the causes of stress.
- ❖ If possible, reduce the things that cause stress.
- ❖ Think about working fewer hours.
- ❖ Ask about options such as leaves or part time work.
- ❖ Avoid shift work as much as possible.
- ❖ Try to eat well, drink enough fluids and get enough rest.
- ❖ Ask friends and family to help out at home.
- ❖ If necessary, ask for a different type of work.



## Computers

There is NO strong evidence to suggest that computers can harm your unborn baby.



## Chemicals

### Health Concerns

There are many chemicals that can cause problems during pregnancy, for example lead, mercury, pesticides or solvents. Chemicals can enter your body when you breathe, eat or drink or through your skin. Chemicals can cause miscarriage, birth defects and other problems during pregnancy.

### Recommendations

- ❖ Find out about risks and precautions before using any chemicals.
- ❖ Follow safety guidelines.
- ❖ Use the right safety equipment.
- ❖ Always wash your hands before eating.
- ❖ Suggest safer products to your employer.
- ❖ If you are concerned, request a transfer to a different work area.

## Biological Factors

### Health Concerns

Biological risks include infections by a virus, bacteria, fungus or parasite. Some can seriously harm your unborn baby, such as Rubella (German Measles), Chicken Pox, Toxoplasmosis, Cytomegalovirus, Listeria and Hepatitis. Infections may cause birth defects, miscarriage and other problems in your unborn baby. If you work with animals, young children or with sick people, you may have to take extra care.



### Recommendations

- ❖ Be protected. Make sure you are immunized before pregnancy.
- ❖ When possible, avoid contact with people who are infectious.
- ❖ Wear special protection (gloves, masks, etc.) as recommended.
- ❖ Wash your hands often.

### IS IT SAFE TO KEEP WORKING?

If you are healthy and have no pregnancy problems, you can likely continue to work without causing harm to yourself or your unborn baby. With a few small changes most risks can be reduced. Talk to your health care provider about your pregnancy and the type of work that you do.

### MORE WAYS TO KEEP HEALTHY AT WORK

Here are a few other things that you can do at work to help you have a healthy pregnancy:

- ❖ Bring your own lunch or make healthier choices at work.
- ❖ Keep healthy snacks handy.
- ❖ Avoid drinks with caffeine such as coffee/tea.
- ❖ Go to the bathroom often.
- ❖ Take a walk on your breaks.
- ❖ Rest and relax when you can.



### FOR MORE INFORMATION

- ❖ Talk to your health care provider.
- ❖ Contact your local health unit.
- ❖ Talk to someone at work (employer, nurse, health and safety rep.).
- ❖ Call Motherisk about workplace exposures during pregnancy (1-416-813-6780, [www.motherisk.org](http://www.motherisk.org)).
- ❖ Contact the Occupational Health Clinic for Ontario Workers for information on specific workplace risks (1-877-817-0336, [www.ohcow.on.ca](http://www.ohcow.on.ca)).
- ❖ Contact the Ontario Human Rights Commission if you have questions about your rights during pregnancy (1-800-387-9080, [www.ohrc.on.ca](http://www.ohrc.on.ca)).

### WHEN TO GET HELP?

#### Do not delay!

Get medical help right away if you have any of the following symptoms or if something does not feel right.

- ❖ Bad cramps or stomach pains that don't go away.
- ❖ Bleeding, trickle or gush of fluid from your vagina.
- ❖ Lower back pain/pressure, or a change in lower backache.
- ❖ A feeling the baby is pushing down.
- ❖ Contractions, or change in strength or number of them.
- ❖ An increase in the amount of vaginal discharge.
- ❖ Fever, chills, dizziness, vomiting or a bad headache.
- ❖ Blurry vision or spots before your eyes.
- ❖ Sudden or severe swelling of your feet, hands or face.
- ❖ A significant change in your baby's movement.

**Go to the hospital right away and contact your health care provider if you have any of these symptoms!**