

LIFESTYLE FAQs:

What is the difference between medical leave and maternity leave?

Medical leave, as determined by your physician, is declared when your health, your baby's health or your place of work is at risk due to your pregnancy.

Examples include **high blood pressure conditions** in pregnancy, **bleeding** in pregnancy and **severe nausea and vomiting**. If the pregnancy is normal, medical leave is often declared a week or two before the expected due date and for six weeks after delivery. Sometimes, work duties are modified to avoid risks, but the woman continues to attend work.

Maternity leave is a **social program** to allow a woman to take time away from work without concerns that she may lose her job. This is to allow women to take work leave if they feel too tired to work, have aches and pains they would prefer not to endure at work, or find the normal symptoms of pregnancy are making it too difficult to perform the job. It is also available for the woman to stay at home with her new child for a period of time after her medical leave expires. Maternity leave does not require a physician to decide on timing.

Is it ok to sit in front of a computer screen during pregnancy?

Yes. There is no evidence that radiation from a computer screen is harmful to a pregnant woman or her developing baby.

Similarly, there is **no known risk** from:

- Microwave ovens
- TV screens
- Cellphones

If I lift my arms over my head, will that cause the cord to wrap around the baby's neck?

No, it will not.

This is a great example of an **old wives' tale**. There is **no evidence** that putting our body in any position will lead to the cord becoming tangled around the baby's neck, arms, body or legs.

Other old wives' tales include:

- Predicting the sex of the baby by heart rate (or any other predictor)
- Using heartburn as a sign that a baby will have a lot of hair
- Suggesting eating spicy food causes a hot-tempered baby

Can I change the cat litter while I'm pregnant?

Preferably not. Cat droppings may contain the parasite which causes **toxoplasmosis**. In the fetus, toxoplasmosis is a **serious illness**. It can cause blindness, brain damage leading to mental handicap, and even death.

To avoid getting toxoplasmosis:

- Have someone else change the cat's litter (and wash their hands well afterwards)
- Avoid gardening or, at the very least, wear gloves in the garden and wash your hands after gardening
- Wash or cook vegetables before eating

Fortunately, 25 to 35 per cent of women have already been infected with toxoplasmosis before pregnancy. There is no threat to the developing baby in these women.

Can I have a flu shot while I'm pregnant?

Flu vaccine is not only considered **safe**, but is **recommended** in pregnancy. Pregnant women are at **greater risk of severe influenza** and should be vaccinated.

We also recommend that **all children and adults who will be in close contact** with pregnant women and newborn babies be **vaccinated** against the flu. This will decrease the chance they will transmit the virus to these vulnerable populations.

Some vaccines are not recommended because studies are limited or they use live virus in the vaccine preparation. Check with your doctor if you are considering any other vaccinations in pregnancy.

Can I use insect repellent during pregnancy?

To avoid mosquito bites:

- Avoid being outdoors during dawn and dusk
- Wear long sleeves and pants in light colours
- Apply personal insect repellents

The insect repellent that gives the best and longest protection is DEET. There is no evidence that DEET causes problems when used in pregnancy or for young children. However, it is not recommended for children under six months of age.

Use lower concentrations if you are only going to be outside for a short period of time.

Alternative products include: soybean oil repellents and OFF! Botanicals Lotion Insect Repellent.

Neither of these is as effective as DEET.

Is it ok to have an x-ray during pregnancy?

X-rays are **generally avoided** in pregnancy, but are safe if needed for health reasons.

The X-ray technician should always provide you with a **protective lead apron** during pregnancy.

Maximum safe exposure limit is considered to be 5 rads of radiation. It would take 50,000 dental X-rays to reach this dose.

Can I go to a tanning salon?

Tanning beds are not considered healthy for anyone.

The usual risks from tanning are:

- Skin cancer
- Premature aging of the skin

During pregnancy, **additional risks** include:

- Overheating
- Permanent pigment changes
- Greater susceptibility to 'sunburn'
- Prolonged uncomfortable positioning

Can I go in the hot tub when pregnant?

The concern with hot tub use in the first trimester is that **overheating** has been associated with an **increased incidence of birth defects**.

The other concern with hot tubs is that the **heat can lower your blood pressure**. In pregnancy it is normal for your blood pressure to be lower than usual, so this extra effect could lead you to have symptoms of dizziness and cause you to faint.

The bottom line is that if you use a hot tub, **limit your time to less than 10 minutes**, get out if you sense yourself feeling too hot. **When you get out, do so slowly** and watch for symptoms of dizziness or lightheadedness.

What common chemicals should I avoid? Hair dye? Nail polish? Household cleaners?

A good general rule of thumb is to **avoid any chemicals that give off strong odours**. Only use them in a well-ventilated space and avoid contact with the skin.

Although **hair dyes** are considered safe, it may be best to wait until after three months of pregnancy to use these as they may be absorbed through the scalp. **Nail polish remover** is more of an issue than nail polish. **Household cleaners** that are not organic solvents are safe.

A good resource for checking the safety of any chemical or medication in pregnancy and breastfeeding is **Motherisk** (www.motherisk.org or 1-877-439-2744).

Can I paint the nursery?

Painting with **standard household latex paints** is considered **safe** in pregnancy. **Oil-based paints** are more questionable as they may contain **organic solvents** or require solvents during clean-up.

Prolonged exposure to **fumes** is the biggest concern.

For these reasons it is recommended that you:

- Paint with latex-based paints only
- **Wear protective clothing** and gloves
- Ensure **adequate ventilation**
- **Remove yourself from** the environment if the **fumes** bother you

Removing old paint can be a bigger issue. Chemicals used to remove paint and lead in paint applied prior to 1970 should be avoided by pregnant women.

What positions are safe for sleeping during pregnancy?

Some pregnant women notice symptoms of **feeling faint or dizzy** when they lie on their **back**, particularly in the last three months of pregnancy.

Many women have heard and read the advice to sleep on their left side during pregnancy.

However, recent evidence shows that the baby is not adversely affected when women lay on their backs, even if they have symptoms.

The bottom line is you can **sleep on either side or your back**. If you feel faint or dizzy then change positions to help yourself feel better but do not worry that you have done any harm to your baby.

What are the recommendations regarding lifting in pregnancy?

Every woman and every pregnancy is different. There are **no specific guidelines** regarding lifting or physical activity in pregnancy.

Some studies have shown a **link** between **physical exertion** in pregnancy and **preterm delivery**, however the evidence is not conclusive.

Repetitive and/or heavy lifting can cause or exacerbate muscle and joint symptoms that are common in pregnancy, such as low-back pain.

Early on in your pregnancy, assess the **physical demands** of your occupation and your lifestyle, and modify them as necessary. Let us know if you encounter any difficulties in doing so.

Can I do sit-ups during pregnancy?

Sit-ups or abdominal crunches can be done in the **first trimester**.

Sit-ups after the first trimester are not recommended for a number of reasons:

- As your rectus abdominis muscles stretch in pregnancy, sit-ups will become less effective.
- Sit-ups may increase the chance of **developing separation of the rectus abdominis muscles**.
- Lying on your back may cause you to **feel dizzy or light-headed**. This does not pose any danger to you or your baby but it is an indication to change positions.

As you progress through the second and third trimesters, we recommend you switch to different core-strengthening exercises such as planks, seated crunches and pelvic tilts.

How do I avoid overdoing it when I'm exercising while pregnant?

In the past, recommendations were made based on your heart rate during exercise. This is no longer the case.

The best judge is **your sense of how hard you are exerting yourself**. One way to assess your exertion levels is with the 'talk test'. During exercise you should be able to converse easily (low intensity) or in somewhat shortened sentences (moderate intensity), but should not be breathless (high intensity).

As you progress **through your pregnancy**, you will likely need to **modify/decrease your workouts** to attain the same level of exertion.

Can I fly during pregnancy?

Canadian airlines will allow you to fly within Canada up to, and including, your **36th week**.

There may be complications in your pregnancy that prevent you from travelling and/or flying, so it is best to discuss your travel plans with your care provider.

If you take a **long journey**, we advise you **get up and move** around during the flight or long car ride to reduce the chance of blood clots forming in your legs. If you are travelling out of the city, it is a good idea to carry a copy of your prenatal record with you.

If you are travelling outside of Canada be sure that you have adequate **travel medical insurance** for both **you** and the **baby**. Travelling outside of North America requires assessment of whether you are at risk of any infectious diseases at your destination.