

During **car** travel, it is important to use the **seat belt** correctly. The lower strap should be placed under the abdomen, while the upper strap should run between the breasts. During any journeys where you expect to be sitting for long periods, it is important to reduce the risk of venous thrombosis by **moving your legs frequently**, wearing **compression stockings**, and **getting up at least every two hours** to walk for a short time.

Can I take medications?

Some medications may be taken safely during pregnancy, while others may increase the risk of birth defects and should be avoided. There are also medications, particularly newer ones, for which it is not yet known whether or not they increase the risk of **malformations**. As a general principle, medication should be avoided during pregnancy whenever possible, especially during the first trimester, when the baby’s main organs and systems are developing.

Before taking any medication, not prescribed by a doctor, you should consult them about potential risks/benefits involved.

Taking medications during pregnancy is necessary in some situations. Your doctor will inform you if this is the case. Among the medications considered safe during pregnancy are folic acid, iron, and most vitamins (except vitamin A in high doses).

Can I have dental treatments?

Most dental treatments (such as tooth decay treatments, fillings, root canal treatments, simple tooth extractions, and teeth whitening) are safe during pregnancy. However, all procedures requiring local anaesthesia, if not strictly necessary, should be avoided during the first trimester. More complex treatments (such as wisdom tooth extraction, dental implants, or procedures involving general anaesthesia) should, whenever possible, be performed during the second trimester of pregnancy.



Can I take X-rays?

High doses of radiation are potentially harmful to the baby’s growth, and the effect is cumulative, but the doses used in most diagnostic X-ray examinations are considered safe. Your doctor will advise you if an X-ray is necessary. As general principles during pregnancy, it is recommended to: avoid X-rays during the first 3 months of pregnancy, unless this is strictly necessary; use a protective lead apron over your abdomen during the examination; whenever possible, avoid imaging tests involving high abdominal radiation exposure (such as barium enema, intravenous urography, or abdominal computerised tomography scans).



UNIDADE LOCAL DE SAÚDE
SANTA MARIA



**LIFESTYLES AND
BEHAVIOURS DURING PREGNANCY**

UNIDADE LOCAL DE SAÚDE SANTA MARIA

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Can I continue to work?

In most cases, it is **safe** to **continue working** during pregnancy. However, in certain situations, this is **not recommended** due to increased health risks. Examples include working in underground mines, diving, and contacting with sheep during lambing or when they are nursing.

In the workplace, it is important to **identify and avoid potential risks**, including:

- high levels of **vibration and noise**
- **extreme temperatures**
- **ionising radiation** (X-rays) or **radioactive substances**
- exposure to **tobacco smoke**
- risk of **trauma** or injury
- exposure to **infectious microorganisms**
- exposure to **pesticides, cytostatic agents, lead, and mercury**.

Working hours should not be excessively long, and regular breaks should be taken. Whenever possible, try to **work with company and avoid excessive stress**. Your doctor will inform you if there are any specific contraindications to your work activities. It is the employer's responsibility to ensure appropriate working conditions, so you should inform them of your pregnancy as early as possible. Please also refer to the leaflet "Labour rights during pregnancy".

Can I exercise?

Physical activity is good for your health and helps reduce the risk of certain pregnancy complications. Most pregnant women can and should continue exercising, provided it **does not cause excessive fatigue or overheating**. If you are able to monitor your heart rate, it should not exceed 60% of the recommended maximum (220 bpm minus your age). Alternatively, ensure that you are able to keep talking without discomfort while exercising.

Sports that carry a **high risk of abdominal trauma, stress to the joints, falls, or reduced oxygenation** should be avoided during pregnancy. These include contact sports, squash, skiing, skating, horse riding, and underwater fishing, etc. If you did not regularly exercise before pregnancy, limit your physical activity to **walking** (up to a maximum of 4 km/h), **swimming**, or **aqua-gymnastics**, for **30–60 minutes, three times per week**. Sometimes, physical activity may be contraindicated during pregnancy. Your doctor will inform you if this is the case.

What type of clothes should I wear?

During pregnancy, you should preferably wear **loose-fitting clothes** and **bras** of appropriate size to accommodate breast enlargement. **High-heeled** shoes may cause back pain and facilitate loss of balance, so they should not be worn regularly. **Maternity girdles** or **support belts** are not recommended in all pregnancies; your doctor will advise you if their use is necessary.

How many hours do I need to sleep?

Sleep requirements vary greatly from person to person. Some women feel very sleepy during pregnancy, while others do not. If you have difficulty sleeping at night, the following measures are recommended: **avoid drinking coffee, black or green tea, and colas** in the hours before bedtime; establish **regular sleep routines** (such as waking up at the same time every morning and avoiding daytime naps); avoid large meals before going to bed. You should also **avoid sleeping on your back**, as in this position the uterus may compress the blood vessels running behind it, reducing blood flow to the baby.



Can I take immersion baths?

There is no contraindication to taking immersion baths during pregnancy. However, you should avoid exposure to very high temperatures and keep in mind that your centre of gravity is altered, so you must take extra care to avoid losing your balance when getting in and out of the bath.

Should I apply cream to my abdomen to prevent stretch marks?

There is no scientific evidence that the regular application of abdominal creams prevents the appearance of stretch marks, which are caused by the rupture of fibres lying deep inside the skin and are probably influenced by individual genetic characteristics. On the other hand, regular application of skin hydration creams may be continued safely during pregnancy.

Can I paint my hair?

Some products used in hair dyes, permanent waves, and hair bleaching agents are potentially harmful to the baby, although there is little scientific evidence to establish this. Although these products are poorly absorbed through the skin of the scalp, it is prudent to **avoid using these products**, particularly during the first trimester of pregnancy.

Can I have sexual relations?

Sexual intercourse is not associated with an increased risk of pregnancy complications, and there are **no formal contraindications** to any sexual positions during pregnancy. In some specific situations, sexual activity may be contraindicated. Your doctor will inform you if this is the case.

Should I perform vaginal douching?

There are no benefits in performing regular vaginal douching during pregnancy. External disinfection of the genitals may be performed, but vaginal irrigation under pressure should be avoided.

Can I smoke?

Tobacco use is associated with an increased risk of pregnancy complications, such as preterm birth and fetal growth restriction, and is therefore **strongly discouraged**. Quitting smoking at any stage of pregnancy reduces the risk of these complications.

Should I limit my sun exposure?

During pregnancy, hormonal changes may cause the appearance of **dark patches on the face** (chloasma of pregnancy), as well as **increased pigmentation** of the abdominal midline (above and below the umbilicus), the genital area, and the nipples. **There is no contraindication to sun exposure** during pregnancy, except when chloasma has appeared in a previous pregnancy, as increased sun exposure may worsen the existing patches. The **usual precautions** with sun exposure should be followed, such as using a sunscreen appropriate for your skin type, avoiding sun exposure between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m., and drinking fluids regularly.



May I travel?

Short-distance air flights, in pressurised aircraft, to countries with adequate healthcare is generally considered safe. **Long-distance travel is discouraged**, due to the increased risk of venous thrombosis and prolonged lack of access to medical care. Travel to countries with **limited healthcare resources** or to **countries endemic infectious diseases** should also be avoided. When in doubt, first seek advice from your doctor. Towards the end of pregnancy, some airlines do not allow pregnant passengers to fly. Please check with your travel agency to know these conditions.