Smoking During pregnancy

Smoking nearly doubles a woman’s risk of having a low-birth weight baby. In 2004, 11.9% of babies born to smokers in the United States were low birth weight (less than 5.5 pounds), compared to 7.2% of babies of nonsmokers. Low birth weight can result from poor growth before birth, preterm delivery or a combination of both. Smoking has long been known to slow fetal growth. Smoking also increases the risk of preterm delivery (before 37 weeks of gestation). Premature and low birth weight babies face an increased risk of serious health problems during the newborn period, chronic lifelong disabilities (such as cerebral palsy, mental retardation and learning problems), and even death. The more a pregnant woman smokes, the greater her risk of having a low birth weight baby. However, if a woman stops smoking even by the end of her second trimester of pregnancy, she is no more likely to have a low birth weight baby than a woman who never smoked. A recent study suggest that women who smoke anytime during the month before pregnancy to the end of the first trimester are more likely to have a baby with birth defects, particularly congenital heart defects. The risk of heart defects appears to increase with the number of cigarettes women smokes. Can smoking cause pregnancy complications? Smoking is associated with a number of pregnancy complications. Smoking cigarettes doubles a women’s risk of developing placental problems. These include:

- Placenta previa (a low lying placenta that covers part or all of the opening of the uterus)
- Placenta abruption (in which the placenta peels away, partially or almost completely, from the uterine wall before delivery). Both can result in heavy bleeding during delivery that can endanger mother and baby, although cesarean delivery can prevent most deaths. Smoking in pregnancy increases a woman’s risk of premature rupture of the membranes (PROM), when the sac that holds the baby inside the uterus breaks before completion of 37 weeks of pregnancy. Usually when it breaks, normal labor ensues within a few hours. If the rupture occurs before 37 weeks of pregnancy, it often results in the birth of a premature baby. Babies whose mothers smoked during pregnancy are up to three times as likely to die from sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) as babies of nonsmokers.