

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

CO restricts the oxygen available to the foetus as it is more readily absorbed by the blood. It takes just 7 hours for your blood to be free from CO after your first cigarette but for your baby that could be up to 14 hours.

Because of less-than-optimal conditions inside the uterus, some babies do not grow as rapidly as they should during pregnancy, a problem known as intrauterine growth retardation (IUGR). These babies often have low stores of body fat and glycogen (a type of carbohydrate that converts into glucose - an energy source). As a direct consequence they are unable to conserve heat and may develop hypothermia. Because of low energy stores the foetus is less able to tolerate the stress of labour than an infant of normal size which can result in the need for caesarian section or lead to stillbirth.

According to research, mothers-to-be who smoke while pregnant are 50-70% more likely to give birth to a baby with a cleft palate than non-smokers.

A study estimated that 30% of SIDS death could have been prevented if the mothers had stopped smoking during pregnancy.

In the normal human foetus, several organ systems mature between 34 and 37 weeks, and the foetus reaches adequate maturity by the end of this period. One of the main organs greatly affected by premature birth is the lungs. The lungs are one of the last organs to mature in the womb; because of this, many premature babies spend the first days/weeks of their life on a ventilator.

Smoking leads to oxygen deprivation and a reduction in the amount of nutrients reaching the foetus. Lower birthweight can be a contributory factor to miscarriage and complications at birth. It is not always easier to give birth to a small baby sometimes this can mean a longer labour.

Modern neonatal intensive care involves sophisticated measurement of temperature, respiration, cardiac function, oxygenation and brain activity. Treatments may include fluids and nutrition through intravenous catheters, oxygen supplementation, mechanical ventilation support and medications. Baby may remain in hospital for several days or weeks.

PPROM is associated with 40% of preterm deliveries and can result in significant neonatal morbidity and mortality. The three causes of neonatal death associated with PPRM are prematurity, sepsis and pulmonary hypoplasia.

Placental abruption is a complication that can affect the placenta during pregnancy or labour. It causes the placenta to start to prematurely come away from the inside of the womb wall. This condition is serious particularly for the baby because the placenta carries nutrients, wastes and oxygen between mother and baby. 40-50% of babies who survive have an increased chance of complications ranging from mild to severe.