

heavy or tiring tasks can be altered or avoided. Your manager has a legal duty to carry out a risk assessment of work. However, remember that there is unlikely to be a large risk to you or your baby from any of these activities. If you have discussed things with your manager and wish to continue working as normal, then you may do so.

Where do I get advice about risks in the workplace?

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) provide guidance on these hazards: *A guide for new and expectant mothers who work.*² Your occupational health department, safety or union representative will also be able to give you advice. Your General Practitioner will be able to help if you do not have an occupational health service.

References

- 1 NHS Plus, Royal College of Physicians, Faculty of Occupational Medicine. *Physical and shift work in pregnancy: occupational aspects of management. A national guideline.* London: RCP, 2009. www.nhsplus.nhs.uk
- 2 The Health and Safety Executive. *A guide for new and expectant mothers who work.* London: HSE, 2003. www.hse.gov.uk

Further copies of this leaflet are available from NHS Plus

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Physical and shift work in pregnancy

Occupational aspects of management

Evidence-based guidance for
employees



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This leaflet is intended for employees. It summarises the findings of a review of the research evidence on the effect of manual handling, prolonged standing, long working hours, shift work and night shifts on the pregnant woman or her baby.¹ It aims to answer some of the questions or concerns you may have about particular aspects of work during your pregnancy. The evidence considered applies to women who are well during their pregnancy; those with pregnancy-related complications need to be considered on an individual basis.

Should I be at work if I am pregnant?

Pregnancy is not an illness and the majority of women remain well throughout their pregnancy. In fact, research shows that most women who work are healthier during their pregnancy than those who do not work. Some studies also show that women who are employed have a lower risk of early delivery than those who are not. In general, work is not harmful in pregnancy. However, while at work you may be exposed to certain hazards that could potentially cause harm to you or your baby. These need to be identified and assessed properly as early as possible in your pregnancy but need not necessarily stop you from working.

What are the hazards at work that may affect my pregnancy?

Some substances that you may encounter at work (for example ionising radiation) are known to cause harm in pregnancy and there are regulations in place to protect you. Other hazards, including infections, are usually assessed on an individual basis. The effects of other aspects of work, such as psychological factors, are less clear.

How do I minimise any risks to my pregnancy at work?

It is very important to tell your manager as early as possible that you are pregnant. Your employer is required by law to identify any important potential hazards at work and carry out a risk assessment. Your employer is also responsible for making any reasonable adjustments to your workplace or to your job during your pregnancy. Your manager should be able to advise you, or to point you towards a source of advice.

If you have any particular worries about the effect of work on your pregnancy then discuss your views and concerns with your manager, and identify any tasks that you are worried about or finding particularly difficult.

Will physically tiring work harm my pregnancy?

Our knowledge of the risks from physical factors at work, including heavy physical

activity, lifting, prolonged standing, long working hours and night work is incomplete. Although quite a lot of research has been done we cannot be certain about the size of the risk, or indeed if there is a risk at all. It is possible that there may be a risk from some of these activities, especially if carried out late in pregnancy. However, it appears that if there are any risks to mother or baby, these are quite small. Indeed, it is possible that being physically active during pregnancy is actually good for your health, and the health of your baby, and that restricting your activities unduly may even be harmful.

What should I do if my job involves physical activities?

For most jobs no specific action will need to be taken. However if your job involves any of the following it is probably advisable to reduce these activities, particularly in the late stages of pregnancy:

- lifting heavy loads
- hard physical work
- prolonged standing – for longer than three hours at a time
- long working hours – working longer than around 40 hours per week.

You should make your manager aware if you have specific worries. Then work together to identify ways in which particularly strenuous,