

Radiation Exposure During Pregnancy

Should I be worried about radiation while I'm pregnant?

Many common medical tests, such as x-rays and CT (computed tomography) scans, expose the patient to radiation. If you have one of these tests while you are pregnant, your baby is also exposed. Some women have jobs that put them at risk of radiation exposure. The more radiation you are exposed to, and the earlier you are in your pregnancy, the more risk there is to your baby.

Can radiation cause birth defects?

If you are exposed to very large doses of radiation (more than the dose from 500 chest x-rays) early in your pregnancy, your baby can have health problems. Your baby is not at risk of birth defects if you are exposed to only a small amount of radiation during your pregnancy. Your baby will have only a slightly higher risk of cancer later in life.

What else do I need to know?

Before you have an x-ray or any other test that will expose you to radiation, make sure to tell your doctor and the radiologist if you are pregnant or think you might be pregnant.

Your doctor will talk to you about the risks to your baby and whether a safer test, such as an ultrasound or MRI (magnetic resonance imaging), could be done instead.

If you could be exposed to radiation at your job, you have the option to tell your employer in writing about your pregnancy and your estimated due date. This will allow them to limit how much radiation you can be exposed to at work. You have the right to withdraw this information for any reason.

Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

American Academy of Family Physicians'
Consumer Education Resource
Web site: <http://familydoctor.org/373.xml>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Web site: <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/radiation/prenatal.asp>

Health Physics Society

Web site: <http://hps.org/publicinformation/ate/faqs/pregnancyandradiationexposure.html>

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This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.

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