

Is it safe to...

The hairdresser's brush is poised above the dye pot when suddenly you gasp, "Wait! Is it safe? I'm pregnant!" **Mercedes Maguire** asks the experts what you can and can't do

Can I dye my hair?

Yes. This myth may have sprung up in the days when the chemicals used in hair dyes were more harmful. These days they are safe, with very little chemical absorbed into the scalp. If dyeing your own hair, wear gloves, rinse your scalp thoroughly and apply in a well-ventilated area.



Can I have facials and massages?

Yes. However, lying flat on your back for prolonged periods from around week 20 may limit blood supply to the baby. Also, be careful which aromatherapy oils are used (see following question).

Can I use essential oils?

There is little evidence about the absorption of these oils into the skin, says Diona Damian, Associate Professor in dermatology at the University of Sydney. However, err on the side of caution when it comes to basil, cedarwood, clary sage, fennel, juniper, marjoram, myrrh, rosemary, sage and thyme oils, which have been linked to uterine contractions.

Can I have baths?

Yes. Jody Drutman, registered nurse and certified midwife, says no infection can pass to the baby as long as your membranes have not ruptured. (Baths in early labour

where your waters have already broken present no risk of infection as delivery is imminent.) However, you should avoid hot baths that make you feel uncomfortable, dizzy or sweaty at any time as they raise your heart rate, which in turn reduces blood flow to the baby.

What over-the-counter medication can I take?

The following advice is provided by Dr Jane Smith of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. Always check with your GP or midwife before taking any medication.

Paracetamol Yes.

Codeine Yes, but not long-term in high doses because this could create withdrawals in baby. 240mg a day is considered safe.

Aspirin No. Some studies have linked aspirin with an increased risk of miscarriage, growth defects in baby and the risk of placental abruption.

Ibuprofen No. As with aspirin, ibuprofen has been linked with birth defects and miscarriage.

Allergy medication It depends. Some old-fashioned antihistamines like dimenhydrinate ➤



Is it safe to...

from previous page

(Dramamine) and dexchlorpheniramine maleate (Polaramine) are safe but newer ones like fexofenadine (Telfast) and cetirizine (Zyrtec) are not. Check labels.

Cold sore creams Generally not safe. The combinations of drugs used in these products may not be safe.

Cough medicines It depends on the brand. Bromhexine (Bisolvon) is safe, but the majority are not as they include a mix of potentially toxic drugs.

Can I stand or sit close to the microwave or computer?

Yes. The concern is with non-iodising radiation leakage, but no evidence has been found that exposure can harm an unborn baby. In 1994, a study by the National Radiological Protection Board of Great Britain found these low-level frequencies will not harm an unborn child. Another large US study the following year came to the same conclusion. If you are concerned with radiation leakage from your microwave, particularly if it is old, invest in a new one or stand away when it is working.

Can I get a fake tan or sunbake?

Dermatologist Diona Damian says there is no evidence linking fake tans with birth defects. She adds it is unsafe for *anyone* to sunbake but pregnant women should also be wary of vitamin D deficiency, which comes from not getting enough sun. "I'm not suggesting anyone lies out and purposely sunbakes, but getting a bit of sun as you walk briefly outside is not going to hurt either."



Can I exercise?

Yes. Exercise promotes a healthy and fit pregnancy, says Martha Lourey-Bird, exercise scientist at the University of NSW. But there are recommendations to follow in order to keep your routine safe.

"If you've been exercising before falling pregnant, you will likely be able to continue through the first trimester.

As your body changes and grows, you need to tailor your exercise to remain safe from injury and falls," says Martha.

"Listen to your body and do not become overheated, breathless or exhausted. As your heart rate and body temperature rise, so too do your baby's. But your unborn baby cannot regulate its temperature as effectively as you can." Martha says low-impact exercises such as walking, swimming and aqua aerobics are best.



“Airlines will restrict travel for pregnant women beyond week 36 in case of premature labour”

Can I drink alcohol or be exposed to cigarette smoke?

Dr Michael Chapman, professor of obstetrics and gynaecology at the University of NSW, says that the occasional glass of alcohol will not pose a problem during pregnancy. But when it comes to passive smoking, Dr Chapman says prolonged and persistent exposure, such as living with a smoker, can harm mother and baby. Temporary exposure, such as walking past a group of smokers, will not.

Is air travel okay?

There is no point at which flying becomes unsafe, says Dr Chapman. However, as a general rule, airlines will restrict travel for pregnant women beyond week 36 to prevent having to divert the plane in case of premature labour. Airlines will usually require a letter from your doctor in order to let you fly after week 36 of your pregnancy, or even earlier for complicated or multiple pregnancies.

Is it safe to wear high heels?

While there is no risk medically, midwife Jody Drutman says circulation is compromised during pregnancy and as you grow, so is your sense of balance, which could lead to a higher risk of tripping or falling. "Restrict high heels to special occasions and to short periods of time," she says.



Is lifting safe?

Yes. As long as you do it properly and get help with anything that is really heavy. Even though for years women were told not to lift anything heavy as it could hurt the unborn baby, there's no evidence this is actually true. Be careful not to put pressure and strain on your joints and ligaments, because they are already softened by the pregnancy hormone relaxin in preparation for labour, and back aches and strains can result.

PP