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W O M E N ' S H E A L T H & W E L L N E S S

Working in Pregnancy

Many women work during all trimesters of pregnancy for many reasons - career pursuit, fulfillment, financial necessity, preservation of insurance, career advancement, and preservation of postpartum leave. Pregnancy does, however, present some challenges to the working mom considering most pregnant women have nausea, vomiting, fatigue, discomforts and pains and reduction in cognitive function “baby brain”. Studies are conflicting, but it does not appear that working during pregnancy affects the mother or their baby adversely. In fact, a woman with an uncomplicated pregnancy who is employed where there are no greater potential hazards than those encountered in routine daily life may continue to work without restriction or interruption until the onset of labor. However, more demanding jobs should be evaluated and discussed with us on a “case by case” basis.

There are some lifting guidelines in pregnancy which are based on gestational age, intermittent vs repetitive lifting, time (hours/day), spent lifting, and lifting height from the floor and distance in front of the body. These are published on NIOSH (National Institute of Occupational Safety) for reference if needed to present to your employer.

Infrequent lifting

<20 weeks - Max weight is 36 pounds

>20 weeks - Max weight is 26 pounds

Repetitive lifting

>1 hour/day - max weight is 18 pounds (1st trimester) and 13 pounds (2nd trimester)

<1 hour/day - max weights are 30 pounds (1st) and 22 (2nd)

It is important to check that you are not exposed at work to harmful chemicals. US employers are mandated by law to provide information regarding exposures from these chemicals - again you can refer to OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) for standards and Data Sheets on exposures in pregnancy.

Some chemicals listed below - these hazards should be minimized or avoided but do not necessarily mean you have to quit your job.

- Pharmaceuticals
- Battery acid
- Benzene
- Dyes used in manufacturing
- Formaldehyde
- Heavy metals
- Solvents
- Inorganic and organic particles
- Pesticides
- Printing inks
- Radiation
- Products used in rubber, plastics and textile manufacturing
- Wood preservatives.

Pregnant patients should work in temperate environments, avoiding excess heat or extreme cold. They should be allowed to stay hydrated, take frequent breaks and dress in appropriate clothing.

Pregnant patients should avoid working in environments that expose them to more than 80 decibels for >8 hours/day. www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/noise/default.html

There is no way to shield a fetus from noise.

Air travel is generally safe. However, there are safe limits in pregnancy due to ionizing radiation exposure. The Federal Aviation Administration should monitor occupationally exposed individuals.

Pregnant women who work in cosmetics should try to maintain good air circulation, wear gloves at all times and limit exposure to chemicals as much as possible. To date, there is no strong evidence of risk of birth defects with this job.

Women in the workplace should know their legal rights - for example the Family Medical Leave Act and the new Pregnancy Discrimination Act. Women should be allowed to have reasonable modifications to their job as long as the viability of the job is not at risk by accommodating.

There are some good descriptions of these acts on this website -

<https://www.abetterbalance.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/2023-03-16-PWFA-Explainer-Updated-Version-For-Posting.pdf>

Some examples of reasonable accommodations are:

- Help with manual labor or lifting
- Additional or longer bathroom breaks
- Frequent breaks for water, snack or eating
- Allowing pregnant patients to have water at their desk
- Providing a stool for sitting at a standing job
- Allowing maternity pants by changing the dress code
- Breaks in a private space for lactation needs
- Remote or telework

Often employers are not familiar with new rules and guidelines for pregnant women and are happy to make accommodations if they are asked. Feel free to print or copy this letter to present to your employer if you are concerned about job duties.

Additionally, if you feel your job is too strenuous please discuss with us at your next appointment. Finally, there will be times when we suggest bed rest or activity restrictions; however, there are few times in pregnancy where this recommendation applies for maternal or fetal benefit. But if you are developing certain pregnancy complications, we will try to forewarn you of this impending restriction so you and your employer can prepare.

Our goal is for you to have a fulfilling pregnancy and healthy baby!
Please let us know if you need additional information or counseling regarding this topic!

Sincerely,

Dr. Mascorro and Zimmerman