

Resource

## Pregnancy and parenthood

Pregnancy and parenthood can bring a lot of stresses and challenges, especially for a parent with RA. These challenges, however, can be overcome with the right support and information, to make parenthood the rewarding experience that all parents strive for.

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Pregnancy and parenthood can bring a lot of stresses and challenges but can also be a very rewarding and wonderful time in a person's life. When one of the parents has RA there are added complications along the way, from potentially having to come off certain medications to conceive and during pregnancy, to post-pregnancy flares and potential difficulties in carrying your child. These challenges, however, can be overcome with the right support and information.

Before you start trying for a baby, it is important to know the relative levels of safety for medication. For obvious ethical reasons, there are no medication studies performed on pregnant women. Information is therefore gathered more slowly, on accidental pregnancies, pregnancy while choosing to stay on a medication where there may be limited data and in what is known about the drugs themselves, how they act in the body and how this could impact on the unborn child. The longer each medication has been around, the more evidence there is, giving you the information you need to know which medications to stop or continue and how long to stop them before trying to conceive.

During pregnancy, around three-quarters of women will experience relief from RA symptoms, but that still leaves one quarter who may struggle with managing their RA. Unfortunately, within weeks of giving birth, many women with RA will also experience a severe flare-up of their condition. This can lead to needing to restart medication early on, which may mean that you are not able to breastfeed or can do so, but not for as long as you would have hoped. Whichever decision you make on breastfeeding is a very personal one, based not just on preference, but on weighing up what's best for both of you, on your own individual circumstances, so you should not feel guilty about any decision you make, and if you make decisions at this stage of parenthood or any other that is based on your own personal health this is never selfish, as your health is as important for your child as it is for you.

Babies are hugely tiring, especially when you are recovering from giving birth and may be managing a flare. Then, as babies get bigger and more mobile and approach toddlerhood, there can be added anxieties about lifting them and being able to be as physically active with your child as you would like. Your child will love you and will love spending time with you regardless, and you can get a lot of tips from other parents, and especially from other parents with health conditions such as RA

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### Tips for parents

This leaflet was written after a request from mums who have RA. They felt that tips they had learnt should be passed on to other parents. It was written in conjunction with a Rheumatology Nurse Specialist.

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