

Women's Health

- Women experience different health concerns depending on their stage of life
- There are specific issues to consider related to polio during pregnancy and childbirth
- Menopause symptoms may impact on life satisfaction for polio survivors

There has been limited research on pregnancy, childbirth and polio. Many polio survivors have given birth to healthy children. Others have had significant difficulty having children. Others have been told they are unable to have children. It is important to remember every polio survivor is different and to discuss your personal health with your general practitioner and/or obstetrician.

The information below is based on experience of other polio survivors and experience of health professionals who work with them.

Pregnancy, Giving Birth And The Late Effects Of Polio

The most important issues for polio survivors to consider during pregnancy are:

Respiratory Health

Respiratory capacity, including diaphragm muscle strength, is an important consideration. As the foetus grows, there is less room and more resistance when you breathe. Please discuss your lung function with your general practitioner so appropriate testing can be done before pregnancy.

Kyphoscoliosis

Kyphoscoliosis is an abnormal curve in the spine. Many polio survivors have had corrective surgery to support the spine. Sometimes this can affect giving birth. Using an ultrasound, solutions can usually be found.

Size Of Birth Canal

The birth canal size may be different because of the bone development of the pelvis, from polio. A caesarean section option may help overcome this. The safest type of birth should be discussed with your obstetrician



Abdominal, Spinal And Pelvic Floor Muscle Strength

Some polio survivors have less muscle to support the trunk than others. During pregnancy, the connective tissue is also loosened. Physiotherapy/ rehabilitation team input can assist to give you a tailored approach for support. They may support weak muscles and provide stability with stretched and/or fatigued muscle tissue.

Balance And Stability During Pregnancy

Balance and stability can change during pregnancy as the body weight increases and moves forward. This change can increase risk of falling. Balance and orthotic support may be useful to overcome this.

Recovery

The recovery phase after pregnancy may be longer than other people.

Can I Give Polio To My Child?

There is no clinical evidence that symptoms of the Late Effects of Polio are passed from mother to child.

Other Considerations

These do not specifically relate to polio, but can impact your pregnancy:

- How old you are and the related risks and recovery
- Fatigue associated with pregnancy
- It is ideal to get input from an obstetrician specialised in high-risk birth and a rehabilitation physician who understands disability/polio.

Menopause

There is evidence that women who have more severe postmenopausal symptoms also have more severe post-polio symptoms. This impacts on stress and life satisfaction measures.

A series of studies^{1 2} with polio survivors looked at menopause and sleep function. They found what had the most influence was firstly, psychological symptoms, followed by post-polio symptoms, and thirdly, menopausal symptoms (e.g. night sweats, hot flushes).

- Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) was higher in a post-polio population than the average among the general population.
- HRT was associated with increased menopausal symptoms and sleep disturbances.
- The results of both increased menopausal symptoms and the use of HRT with Post Polio Syndrome (PPS)-related symptoms may indicate a greater effect of menopause for some people with PPS.

- More research is needed to understand the relationship between PPS, the effects of menopause and HRT.
- There was no indication of an increased number of hysterectomies among polio survivors compared to average number in the general population.
- These studies concluded women discuss the risk-benefit ratio with their general practitioner regarding HRT and menopause. It may be best to discuss with your general practitioner how some of the factors which may also influence overall health can be managed. For example, emotional well-being and sleep function.

More Information

- [Speak to your general practitioner or rehabilitation physician](#)
- [Department of Health Maternity Services](#)
- [Raising Children: The Australian Parenting Website](#)
- [Australian Menopause Society](#)

¹Kalpakjian, CZ, Quint, EH & Toussaint, LL. (2007) Menopause and post-polio symptoms as predictors of subjective sleep disturbance in poliomyelitis survivors, *Climacteric*, 10(1): 51-62. DOI: 10.1080/13697130601156645

²Kalpakjian, CZ et al. (2006) Menopause characteristics of women with physical disabilities from poliomyelitis. *Maturitas*. 56 (2):161 – 172. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.maturitas.2006.07.006>

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