

when

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ALCOHOL *and* **PREGNANCY**

WHEN YOU DRINK ALCOHOL, SO DOES YOUR BABY

When you are pregnant, every time you drink alcohol (e.g. beer, wine, spirits or ready-to-drink beverages), your baby is drinking the alcohol too. All alcohol is carried by your bloodstream, through the placenta, to your baby.

Your unborn baby has no protection from the alcohol you drink.

HOW CAN ALCOHOL AFFECT MY BABY?

Drinking alcohol during pregnancy will increase the risk that your baby will have lifelong problems. There is a risk your baby will not grow properly or will be more difficult to look after. For example, they may have permanent learning, behavioural or social problems.

In the most severe situation, there is a risk your baby will be born with an intellectual disability, an unusual face and other birth defects (this is known as “Fetal Alcohol Syndrome”). Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is the general term used to describe the range of problems that can occur.

There is no known safe level of alcohol use at any stage during pregnancy. This includes the time around conception. The more you drink, the greater the risk that your baby will have these kinds of problems.



CAN I DRINK ANY AMOUNT OF ALCOHOL WHEN I AM PREGNANT?

Not all babies are affected the same way by alcohol, so there is no way of knowing whether it is safe to drink. Cutting out alcohol altogether avoids any possible harm.

There is also no safe time to drink alcohol during pregnancy. The risk of physical defects is greatest in the first three months, but your baby's growth, central nervous system and brain development can be affected by drinking alcohol at any stage of pregnancy.



WHAT IS THE BEST ADVICE?

The best advice is to stop drinking alcohol if you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy.

Think ahead. If there is a chance you could be pregnant or you want to get pregnant, try not to drink any alcohol to give your baby the best possible start.

If you think you are pregnant and have been drinking alcohol – don't panic. Stopping your drinking at any time during pregnancy will increase the chances that your baby will be born healthy. Talk to your midwife or doctor if you are concerned.

Your partner, family and friends can help by supporting your choice not to drink. It may be easier if they don't drink alcohol around you.

Find a non-alcoholic drink you like. When you go out, ask for a soft drink, a fruit juice or a lime and soda.

It is never too late to stop drinking alcohol during pregnancy.

If you can't stop your drinking or are worried about the amount of alcohol you drink, get help!
See the back page for recommended contacts.

IS IT SAFE TO DRINK ALCOHOL WHEN I AM BREASTFEEDING?

When you're breastfeeding your baby, the alcohol you drink enters your breast milk and passes to your baby. This can affect your baby's growth and motor development.

It takes nearly two hours for your body to rid itself of one standard drink. If you do enjoy an alcoholic drink now and then, wait until after you have fed your baby. Limit the amount of alcohol you drink if you are breastfeeding. Having too much alcohol can affect your ability to care for your baby. The best advice is to continue to avoid alcohol while breastfeeding, especially during the first month.



Remember that breastfeeding still provides the best, safest and most nutritious food for babies.

For more information or assistance, contact your:

- *midwife or doctor*
- *antenatal clinic*
- *local alcohol and drug service (look under ‘alcohol’ in the phone book)*
- *Alcohol and Drug Helpline 0800 787 797*

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