

Alcohol Use During Pregnancy

Drinking alcohol while you are pregnant can harm your unborn baby and cause long-term problems for your baby after birth. When you drink alcohol, it passes through your placenta to your baby. A baby's liver cannot process alcohol like an adult's liver can, because it is not mature enough.



How does this affect me?

Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can increase your risk of:

- Miscarriage.
- Stillbirth.
- Premature delivery.
- Injury from falls.
- Domestic violence.
- Mood disorders, such as depression and postpartum depression.

How does this affect my baby?

Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can cause fetal alcohol spectrum disorder in your unborn baby (*fetus*). You are at the highest risk of having a baby affected by alcohol if you have 7 or more drinks a week through most of your pregnancy. Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) is a group of birth defects that can occur in a child whose mother drank excessive amounts of alcohol during pregnancy. Defects can include:

- Behavior and attention problems.
- Disorders of the brain and spinal cord (*central nervous system disorders*).
- Problems with the heart, kidneys, and bones.
- Decreased growth before and after birth.
- Learning problems and intellectual disabilities.
- Speech and language problems.
- Vision and hearing problems.
- Smaller head size than normal.
- Sleep and sucking disorders.
- Changes in the shape of the face.

The only way to prevent the condition is to stop drinking alcohol the moment you realize that you are pregnant.

Can I have any alcohol during my pregnancy?

No amount of alcohol is safe during pregnancy. Because of this, it is best not to consume any alcohol at all. **Do not** drink alcohol if:

- You plan to become pregnant.
- You think you may be pregnant.

If you are struggling not to drink, ask your health care provider for help. If you have a drinking problem, the sooner you get help to stop, the better your chance of having a healthy baby.

Where to find more information

- National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism: www.niaaa.nih.gov
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: www.fascenter.samhsa.gov

Summary

- Drinking alcohol during your pregnancy can cause life-long harm to your developing baby.
- No amount of alcohol is safe during pregnancy.
- Stop drinking alcohol if you think you are pregnant or could become pregnant.
- If you are pregnant and you are not able to stop drinking alcohol, talk with your health care provider right away.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.

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