

Even a small change can make a big difference for you and your baby

Alcohol and Pregnancy

What can I do if I find it hard to give up alcohol?

If you think you will find it difficult to cut down or give up alcohol (or other drugs) and you are pregnant or thinking of becoming pregnant, you are not alone.

Ask your health centre, doctor, drug & alcohol counselling service or someone you trust for help. Pregnancy is a shared responsibility and partners, family, friends and community can also play a role in supporting you during this time and helping you stay alcohol free. It's never too late in a pregnancy to cut down or stop drinking and this will increase your chances of having a healthy baby.

So for the health of your unborn baby - remember:

- Less alcohol is better but no alcohol is the best and safest choice.
 - It's never too late to cut down or stop drinking alcohol during your pregnancy.
 - It is important not to smoke or take other drugs.
- Maintain a good diet, including folate and vitamin B supplements and receive good antenatal care.
 - Even a small change can make a big difference for you and your baby.

Some ideas for saying NO to alcohol when you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant.

- No thanks!
- I'd rather have juice, thanks.
- No thanks, I'm being kind to my baby!
- No thanks, when I drink alcohol so does my baby!
- No thanks, not while I'm pregnant!
- No thanks, my baby's too young to drink alcohol!
- No thanks, I'm celebrating being pregnant!

Remember less alcohol is better but no alcohol is the best and safest choice for your unborn baby.

This brochure produced by
**National Organisation for Foetal
Alcohol Syndrome And Related Disorders**

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Are you pregnant or thinking of becoming pregnant?

This brochure gives information that will help you make healthy choices for you and your baby.

Remember, less alcohol is better but no alcohol is the best and safest choice

If I'm pregnant or planning to become pregnant should I drink alcohol?

Researchers know that alcohol can damage your unborn baby at any time during your pregnancy, even before you are sure you are pregnant, so they say **the safest choice is not to drink any alcohol at all during this time.**

Exactly how many drinks will harm my unborn baby?

Researchers **do not** know how much alcohol is safe to drink when you are pregnant.

They do know that the risk of damage to your unborn baby increases the more you drink and that binge drinking is especially harmful.

Even smaller amounts may cause harm so **less alcohol is better but no alcohol is the best and safest choice.**

What can drinking alcohol do to my unborn baby?

Researchers know that when you drink alcohol so does your baby. The alcohol will reach your unborn baby within one minute and she/he will have exactly the same blood alcohol content as you do. The alcohol also stays in your baby longer than it does in you.

Your baby's brain is developing before you are sure you are pregnant, the whole way through your pregnancy and continues to develop after it has been born. Because researchers are not sure how much alcohol might cause harm most say it's safest not to drink any alcohol during this time.

That is, no alcohol if you may become pregnant, you are pregnant or you are breastfeeding (alcohol is also passed to the baby through breast milk).

If you drink alcohol when you are pregnant you may have a miscarriage or the alcohol may cause your baby to be born with Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) or other alcohol related effects

What are FAS and alcohol related effects?

Children born to heavy drinkers may have Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS). This means their brains are damaged forever, they may be small and don't grow normally, their faces look different, such as small eyes and thin lips, they might have trouble seeing, hearing or speaking and they might have heart or kidney problems.

New research has shown that even drinking small amounts of alcohol might affect a baby's brain when it is developing and cause alcohol related

neurodevelopmental disorders (ARND). Although these babies look healthy when they are born, their brains are damaged forever.

This means for the rest of their life they may have developmental delays, learning problems, impulsivity, problems getting along with others, hyperactivity and problems controlling their behaviour.

I know some women who drank when pregnant and their babies aren't affected. Why?

Researchers do not know why for sure. What they do know is the effects of drinking are different for every woman and her baby. You can't compare yourself with your friends because some women and their babies will be affected more than others and eating habits, living conditions, and using other drugs including tobacco all play a part.

What if I had alcohol before I knew I was pregnant?

If you have already consumed small amounts of alcohol during pregnancy, be reassured that the risk of harm to your baby is low. However, since there is no known safe level of alcohol use during pregnancy it is best to stop drinking for the rest of your pregnancy.

If you have been drinking alcohol regularly during your pregnancy or you consumed alcohol heavily on an occasion stopping now will increase your chances of having a healthy baby.