

Alcohol and pregnancy

No alcohol, no risk



Introduction

Many things we hear about pregnancy are old wives' tales, passed along through generations, for example experiencing cravings.



Some people also say drinking small amounts of alcohol while pregnant is ok. But the truth is, the safest option during pregnancy is not to drink alcohol at all.

Whether it's beer, wine, or spirits, alcohol can cause harm to your baby at any time during pregnancy. That's why it is so important for you to be informed about the **'No alcohol, No risk'** message.

This guide has been developed to provide women and their partners with information about alcohol use during pregnancy in order to prevent alcohol-related harm to their baby. We want to raise awareness of the risks of drinking alcohol during pregnancy and promote available supports for pregnant women who continue to drink alcohol. This will help you understand the potential risks of drinking alcohol during pregnancy and the best way to keep your baby safe and healthy.

Alcohol use in pregnancy

Since many pregnancies are not planned, some women may drink alcohol before they realise they are having a baby.

According to the Scottish Health Survey 2015, after a pregnancy is confirmed, many women will stop or cut down the amount of alcohol they consume.

However, since 2012 the Chief Medical Officer, Scotland, has advised that “pregnant women and those trying to conceive should avoid alcohol”.



In Scotland, one in four people drink hazardous or harmful levels of alcohol (more than 14 units a week)

Scottish Health Survey 2016

Alcohol & Pregnancy

– the facts

Whether you are pregnant, thinking about becoming pregnant or know someone who is pregnant, it's important to remember that drinking alcohol while pregnant can put your baby at risk. Some of those risks include the baby being born early or with a low birth weight.



Drinking alcohol during pregnancy may also cause Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

It is unknown if there is a safe amount of alcohol that you can drink when you are pregnant. However, we do know that even small amounts of alcohol cross over the placenta into your baby's circulation.

That's why when you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, your midwife will recommend that no alcohol is the safest choice.

About FASD

A baby's brain and body are growing and developing for the entire nine months of pregnancy. Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can affect how the baby's brain and body develops.

People who live with FASD may experience a range of lifelong disabilities. Some are noticeable at birth and others appear as the child grows and develops.

Some noticeable signs at birth include:

- low birth weight
- small head
- distinctive facial features

Only a small percentage of those affected will have these physical characteristics.

The majority of individuals with FASD may experience difficulties in many of the following areas:

- attention, learning and memory
- sensory impairment
- understanding the world around them
- poor social skills
- hyperactivity
- delayed language development
- delay in meeting milestones

Brain domains and FASD



There are 9 brain functions that can potentially be affected by alcohol use during pregnancy.



“Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a lifelong condition that results from a baby being exposed to alcohol before birth. This exposure to alcohol affects how the baby’s brain and body can develop.

People with FASD may require additional support at home, school and work.”

(Dr. Sally Longstaffe MD, FRCPC Medical Director,
Developmental Pediatrician, Manitoba FASD Centre)

What else affects a developing baby?

No two babies are affected the same way by alcohol.



The effect alcohol will have on your developing baby's health is related to:

- How often you drink
- How much you drink and
- At what time during pregnancy you drink

The way alcohol affects your body and your baby is influenced by many other things. Some of these are things you can't control such as your age, overall health and genes. But there are things you can do to help have the healthiest pregnancy possible:

- Attending regular antenatal appointments
- Eat healthy food
- Reduce stress
- Exercise
- Avoid smoking and other drug use

Choosing not to drink and taking care of yourself in other ways when you're pregnant can make a big difference to your baby's future health.



'The degree of damage to the unborn baby will depend on its stage of development at the time of exposure to alcohol because different parts of the brain develop at different times during pregnancy'

(FASD: Parenting a child with an invisible disability. Brown & Mather, 2014)



Are you a dad-to-be?

If you are a partner of a pregnant woman, there are practical ways that you can support a healthy pregnancy.

If you smoke, pregnancy is an ideal time to quit as it helps your baby grow before birth and reduces the risk of cot death and health related problems such as asthma.

Choose not to drink when you're with your partner or stop drinking – if you drink, it can be more difficult for her not to drink.

Be encouraging – you can support the choices your partner makes about her health.

Be proactive – think of activities that don't involve drinking. As a host, offer mocktails and other non-alcoholic drinks.

Finding Help

If you are close to someone who is pregnant and drinking, consider some of these ideas about how to help:

- Ask her if she wants information or support.
- Don't judge, be critical or push her towards solutions.
- Offer practical support like avoiding alcohol when you are together, caring for other children to give her a break, or attending midwife or other appointments with her.
- Recognise changes, big or small, that she may make about drinking.
- Assist her with getting the professional support she may need.

If you are a pregnant woman who needs help to stop drinking, contact your midwife or doctor.



Understanding alcohol units

 <p>Single Gin & tonic ABV 40%</p> <p>1 UNIT 120 calories</p>	 <p>Sambuca shot ABV 42%</p> <p>1 UNIT 123 calories</p>	 <p>Pimms ABV 25%</p> <p>1.3 UNITS 156 calories</p>	 <p>Alcopop ABV 5%</p> <p>1.4 UNITS 160 calories</p>	 <p>Red wine (125ml) ABV 12.5%</p> <p>1.6 UNITS 85 calories</p>
 <p>Bottle of lager ABV 5.2%</p> <p>1.7 UNITS 145 calories</p>	 <p>Double whisky ABV 40%</p> <p>2 UNITS 128 calories</p>	 <p>Mojito ABV 40%</p> <p>2 UNITS 150 calories</p>	 <p>Champagne ABV 11.5%</p> <p>2 UNITS 133 calories</p>	 <p>Cosmopolitan ABV 12.5%</p> <p>2 UNITS 151 calories</p>
 <p>White wine (175ml) ABV 12.5%</p> <p>2.3 UNITS 244 calories</p>	 <p>Pint of bitter ABV 5%</p> <p>2.8 UNITS 288 calories</p>	 <p>Pint of lager ABV 5.2%</p> <p>3 UNITS 244 calories</p>	 <p>Pint of cider ABV 5.3%</p> <p>3 UNITS 194 calories</p>	 <p>Bottle of wine ABV 13.5%</p> <p>10 UNITS 510 calories</p>

