

ALCOHOL AND
PREGNANCY

GO
ALCOHOL
FREE
NO
RISK
OF FASD



MAKE EVERY TRIMESTER
#DRYMESTER

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INTRODUCTION

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



Some people 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.

Since 2016 the Chief Medical Officer for England has advised that **"If you are pregnant or think that you could become pregnant, the safest approach is not to drink at all, to keep risks to your baby to a minimum."**

In England 10.4 million people consume alcohol at levels above the UK Chief Medical officers' low risk drinking guidelines (PHE March 2019).



THE UK HAS THE FOURTH HIGHEST LEVEL OF PRENATAL ALCOHOL USE IN THE WORLD.

(Popova et al., 2017)



ALCOHOL AND 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 FOETAL 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.

WHAT IS FASD?

FOETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER



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

THERE IS NO CURRENT DATA AROUND THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN AFFECTED BY FASD IN THE UK.

BRAIN DOMAINS AND FASD



THERE ARE **9** BRAIN FUNCTIONS THAT CAN POTENTIALLY BE AFFECTED BY ALCOHOL USE DURING PREGNANCY

Executive Functioning

Sensory and Motor

Academic Skills

Brain Structure

Living and Social Skills

Focus and Attention

Cognition

Communication

Memory



FOETAL 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?

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

- How often you drink
- How much you drink
- 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.

NO TWO BABIES ARE AFFECTED THE SAME WAY BY ALCOHOL



CHILDREN WITH FASD CAN APPEAR BRIGHT AND TALKATIVE AND CAN APPEAR TO LEARN, BUT OFTEN FORGET WHAT THEY HAVE LEARNED BY THE FOLLOWING DAY. THEY CAN ALSO BEHAVE INAPPROPRIATELY. **BECAUSE THE CAUSE OF THEIR DIFFICULT BEHAVIOUR IS NOT UNDERSTOOD,** THEY FRUSTRATE TEACHERS AND ARE OFTEN LABELLED AS 'NAUGHTY'.

Cook and Mukherjee, 2016. How foetal alcohol spectrum disorders could be a hidden epidemic. The Conversation.

<http://theconversation.com/how-foetal-alcohol-spectrum-disorders-could-be-a-hidden-epidemic-52835>

ARE YOU A PARENT-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



SUPPORTING MUMS-TO-BE

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.

SAFE SLEEP, BREASTFEEDING AND ALCOHOL ADVICE



Breastfeeding and drinking alcohol

Anything you eat or drink while you're breastfeeding can find its way into your breast milk, and that includes alcohol. There is some evidence that regularly drinking more than 2 units of alcohol a day while breastfeeding may affect your baby's development. If you're breastfeeding and do drink alcohol, you should have no more than 1 or 2 units of alcohol once or twice a week. If you do intend to have a social drink, you could try avoiding breastfeeding for 2 to 3 hours per unit

after drinking. This allows time for the alcohol to leave your breast milk. You'll need to make sure breastfeeding is established before you try this. You may want to plan ahead by expressing some milk before a social function. Then you can skip the first breastfeed after the function and feed your baby with your expressed milk instead. Bear in mind your breasts may become uncomfortably full if you leave long gaps between feeds.

Risks of using alcohol following the birth of your baby

Drinking alcohol may make you less aware of your baby's needs. If you do drink alcohol your baby should be cared for by an adult who has not had any alcohol.

Never share a bed or sofa with your baby if you have drunk any alcohol. Doing this has a strong association with sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

A downloadable version of this booklet is available here: www.drymester.org.uk

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