

ALCOHOL AND  
PREGNANCY

**NO  
SAFE  
TIME  
NO  
SAFE  
AMOUNT**



**#DRYMESTER**

HELPING PARENTS-TO-BE GO ALCOHOL FREE



This booklet uses the terms 'woman' or 'mother' throughout. These should be taken to include people who do not identify as women but who are pregnant.



Essex County Council



Hertfordshire

# INTRODUCTION

Many things we hear about pregnancy are passed along through generations.



Some people say drinking small amounts of alcohol while pregnant is OK. But the truth is, the only safe 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 the Chief Medical Officer is clear that, if you're pregnant or planning to become pregnant, the safest approach is not to drink alcohol at all to keep risks to your baby to a minimum.

This guide will help you understand the risks of drinking alcohol during pregnancy and the support that is available to pregnant women and partners who may find it difficult to stop drinking alcohol.

We want to help you to keep your baby safe and healthy.

# KNOW THE EXPERT ADVICE

If you're pregnant or planning to become pregnant, the safest approach is **not to drink alcohol at all** to keep risks to your baby to a minimum.

**UK Chief Medical Officers**

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) endorse the Chief Medical Officers' guidelines regarding alcohol use in pregnancy.

# ALCOHOL AND PREGNANCY THE RISKS

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 miscarriage, the baby being born early, a low birth weight and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

Since many pregnancies are not planned, some women may drink alcohol before they realise they are having a baby. If you are in this position, the best thing you can do for you and your baby is to stop at the earliest opportunity and avoid alcohol for the remainder of your pregnancy. Your midwife will ask you about your alcohol use, this is an important part of your antenatal care and an opportunity to talk openly and discuss any concerns you may have.

If you are a regular and heavy drinker, you may well need additional support. At the earliest opportunity speak to your midwife, GP or local specialist alcohol service for advice on how to stop drinking safely.



# WHAT IS FASD?

FETAL 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 which can lead to a range of lifelong disabilities.**

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder is the term used to describe this range of lifelong disabilities. There are over 400 known conditions that can include physical, mental, behavioural and learning difficulties. Individuals affected typically have a combination of these conditions and everyone is impacted differently.

Recent research shows that FASD may affect

UP TO **3.6%** of children.

That's the equivalent of approximately

**1,202** children born each year in Hertfordshire and Essex.

## USEFUL LINKS

**National FASD**

<https://nationalfasd.org.uk/>

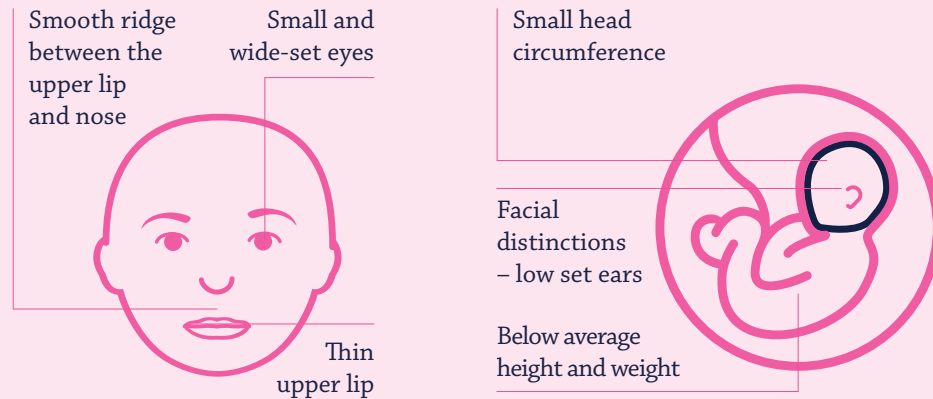
**FASD.ME**

<https://fasd.me/>

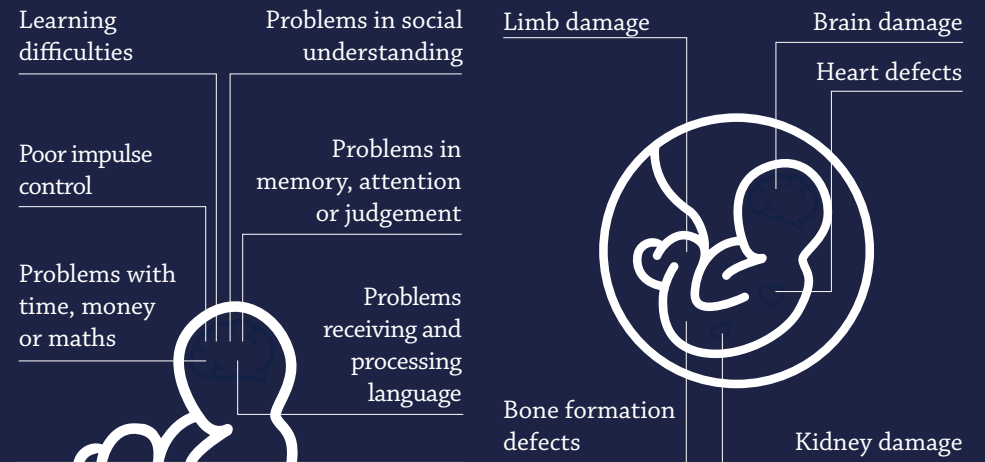


## NO TWO BABIES ARE AFFECTED THE SAME WAY BY ALCOHOL

**Some symptoms are noticeable at birth:**



**Some symptoms become apparent as the baby or child develops:**



**LESS THAN 10%** of those with FASD will have these recognisable facial features

FASD is commonly misdiagnosed as other disorders such as ADHD and Autism. People with FASD also have many strengths. Diagnosis and FASD-informed support helps create brighter futures.



# SUPPORT A PARENT- TO-BE TO GO ALCOHOL FREE

**If your partner is pregnant, your support is very important.**



## TOP TIPS TO SUPPORT YOUR PARTNER

### 1 GO ALCOHOL FREE

Show your support by taking part in #DRYMESTER and going alcohol free for the duration of your partner's pregnancy.

### 2 NO SAFE TIME NO SAFE AMOUNT

People often suggest things like '1 drink won't hurt.' Help your partner by letting people know that there is no safe time or safe amount to drink during pregnancy, and that you won't be taking the risk.

### 3 OFFER ALTERNATIVES

In social situations or as a host, be prepared with and offer non-alcoholic alternatives.

### 4 BE PROACTIVE

Think of activities that don't involve drinking alcohol.

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

- Ask them if they want information or support
- Don't judge, be critical or push them towards solutions
- Offer practical support like avoiding alcohol when you are together, caring for other children to give them a break, or attending midwife or other appointments with them
- Provide encouragement and acknowledge any positive changes they make
- Assist them with getting the professional support they may need

# SAFE SLEEP, BREASTFEEDING AND ALCOHOL ADVICE



## Breastfeeding and drinking alcohol

Breastfeeding can build a strong emotional bond between you and your baby and protects your baby from infections and diseases as well as providing health benefits for you.

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 event. 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 especially 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](http://www.drymester.org.uk)

The spelling of 'fetal' is consistent with NICE guidelines.



**For helpful tips and advice to go alcohol free during pregnancy, or to support a loved one, find out more at [drymester.org.uk/he](http://drymester.org.uk/he)**

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