

Even small amounts of alcohol can affect an unborn baby's development, leaving lifelong impacts.

The National Health and Medical Research Council recommend that to reduce the risk of harm to their unborn child, women who are pregnant or planning pregnancy should not drink alcohol.



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For more information about alcohol use during pregnancy, head to alcoholthinkagain.com.au

Alcohol and pregnancy

There is no safe amount or time for alcohol use during pregnancy.



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There is no safe amount or time to drink alcohol during pregnancy.

How is alcohol harmful to unborn babies?

Alcohol is a teratogen, which means it can interrupt the normal development of an unborn baby. The potential outcome from alcohol exposure may vary and can be permanent and lifelong.

A mother's placenta does not protect a baby from alcohol. When a woman drinks alcohol, it passes to the baby, which means the baby receives a similar concentration of alcohol as the mother.

A baby's brain grows and develops throughout pregnancy. Alcohol can interfere with the chemicals necessary for normal brain development. A baby's developing brain is more vulnerable to damage than a mature adult brain. Drinking alcohol at any time during pregnancy, even at low levels, can harm the development of the unborn baby.

Alcohol use when pregnant can cause a range of lifelong physical, mental and behavioural disabilities, known as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD).

Some problems people with FASD might experience can include:

- Growth and birth defects, such as distinctive facial features, joint and limb abnormalities, heart and kidney defects, and growth problems.
- Intellectual problems, such as memory and learning issues, difficulties with speech and language, cognitive deficits, difficulty with judgement, reasoning or understanding consequences of actions.
- Behavioural problems, such as hyperactivity and increased irritability, in addition to social and emotional issues.

Alcohol exposure can also cause miscarriage, stillbirth, premature birth and low birth weight.

What about planning a pregnancy?

The National Health and Medical Research Council recommend women who are pregnant or planning pregnancy should not drink alcohol. A baby's brain starts to grow very early in pregnancy, often before the mother knows she is pregnant.

What if alcohol was drunk before finding out about pregnancy?

If a woman drinks alcohol without knowing she is pregnant it does not automatically mean the baby will be harmed. Every pregnancy is different and there are a range of factors that play a role in determining the risk of harm to the baby.

It's important to know it's never too late – every effort made to stop drinking alcohol, or reduce the amount of alcohol consumed, lowers the risk of harm to the unborn baby and benefits the mother's health.

If you or someone you know is pregnant, or concerned that alcohol has been consumed in early pregnancy, or are having trouble stopping drinking, speak with your health care professional.

What about breastfeeding?

It is recommended that women who are breastfeeding should not drink alcohol. If a mother breastfeeds her baby while there is still alcohol in her breastmilk, the baby consumes that alcohol. It takes about two hours for the body to clear one standard drink from breast milk for an average woman, and breast milk is only free from alcohol once the mother's blood is free from alcohol. Expressing does not speed up the process, or reduce the amount of alcohol in the remaining breast milk.

Alcohol in breast milk can disrupt the hormones needed to successfully breastfeed, and alcohol can also adversely affect feeding behaviour and patterns of a breastfed baby.

Tips to avoid alcohol when pregnant or planning a pregnancy.

It can be difficult to avoid alcohol in social situations, particularly in the early stages if trying to keep the pregnancy a secret.

Women tell us some of the easiest ways to help them stay alcohol-free is by:

- Having alcohol-free alternatives.
- Arranging social gatherings where alcohol is not a key feature.
- Having a strong support network, which includes partners and friends expressing their support in a woman's decision to not drink alcohol, and joining her in not drinking.
- Having an excuse prepared for why you're not drinking, particularly if wanting the pregnancy to remain secret in the early stages.

For anyone concerned about their own or another person's alcohol or drug use, including during pregnancy, the Alcohol and Drug Support Line is a free, confidential, non-judgemental telephone counselling, information and referral service. Contact them 24 hours a day on **9442 5000** or **1800 198 024** (country callers).

For more, visit alcoholthinkagain.com.au