

# Pregnancy and Alcohol



If you're pregnant or planning to get pregnant, no alcohol at all is the safest choice.

## How much alcohol is safe during pregnancy?

Nobody knows exactly how much alcohol is safe to drink in pregnancy. It is known that the more you drink the greater the risk to your unborn baby. Binge drinking or getting drunk during heavy drinking sessions, is especially harmful to your unborn baby. If you drink alcohol in this way it increases the risk of:

- miscarrying your baby
- your baby's brain being harmed
- your baby having physical abnormalities
- your baby being born with a low birth weight.

No alcohol is the safest choice for a healthy pregnancy.

## What effects does alcohol have during pregnancy?

If you are pregnant and you drink alcohol, it can affect your health and the health of your baby. Any alcohol you drink crosses the placenta and reaches your baby's blood within one minute. Your baby will have the same blood alcohol content that you do but the alcohol will stay in your baby's blood longer.

Drinking even small amounts of alcohol might affect your baby's brain when it is developing. The most severe type of harm from drinking alcohol during pregnancy is a syndrome called Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS). Babies born with FAS may be small and not grow normally, their faces may look different, with small eyes and thin lips, they may have trouble seeing, hearing or speaking and they may have heart, kidney, or life long behaviour problems.

Research has also found that alcohol increases the risk of miscarriage, or having a stillborn, premature or low birth weight baby. Low birth weight babies can have serious health problems like heart and breathing difficulties or cerebral palsy.

Health information from the Women's and Children's Hospital





### When is it safe to drink?

Alcohol can damage your unborn baby at any time during your pregnancy.

The first few weeks after conception are a very vulnerable period for the unborn baby. This is often the time when you are unaware that you are pregnant. Because the baby's brain continues to develop through the whole pregnancy, there is no safe time to drink alcohol.

### What if I drank alcohol before I knew I was pregnant?

If you drank small amounts of alcohol before you knew you were pregnant, 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 have drunk a lot of alcohol you can stop now to increase your chances of having a healthy baby.

### How come some women drink when they're pregnant and their babies are fine?

No one knows for sure. 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 like tobacco all play a part.

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

If you think you will find it hard 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 doctor, health centre, drug and 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. Any reduction in your drinking will increase your chances of having a healthy baby so it's never too late in your pregnancy to cut down or stop drinking alcohol.

### How do I say no to alcohol without sounding rude?

Because alcohol is a part of many cultures and many women drink, it can sometimes be difficult to say no to alcohol. Some things you could say are:

- No thanks.
- I'd rather have juice thanks.
- No thanks, I'm being kind to my baby.
- No thanks, when I drink 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.
- No thanks, pregnancy and alcohol don't mix.

### What other things can I do to give my baby a healthy start?

#### Take folic acid:

Take a 0.5 mg folic acid tablet every day for at least one month before you get pregnant and for the first three months of pregnancy. This reduces the chance of your baby having spina bifida or other neural tube defects by up to 70%. For more information see the Folic Acid for Women brochure in this series.

#### Smoking:

Smoking or being exposed to passive smoking increases your chances of serious health risks for you and the baby. Smoking around the baby is a risk factor for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Before pregnancy is a good time for both you and your partner to get support to quit smoking.



For further information about anything in this brochure:

- Talk to a doctor, community health nurse, or midwife
- Phone Women's & Children's Hospital Health Information Centre on 8161 6875
- Contact NOFASARD the National Organisation for Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Related Disorders on 0418 854 947
- Phone Pregnancy Drugs Information Centre on 8161 7222
- Check websites [www.dhs.sa.gov.au/pregnancy](http://www.dhs.sa.gov.au/pregnancy) and [www.healthysa.sa.gov.au](http://www.healthysa.sa.gov.au)

For support:

- Phone Alcohol & Drug Information Service (24hour phone counselling) on 1300 131 340
- Phone QUIT SA on 131 848 for support to quit smoking
- Phone Women's Healthline on 1300 882 880 for free confidential health counselling

Visits the Australian Government's Australian Alcohol Guidelines at [www.alcoholguidelines.gov.au/](http://www.alcoholguidelines.gov.au/) for more detailed information on pregnancy and alcohol.

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