

Frequently asked questions

What if I drank before I found out I was pregnant?

It is quite common for a woman to have consumed alcohol before she realises that she is pregnant. It is unlikely that your baby has been harmed. However, it is important to stop drinking alcohol as soon as you know you are pregnant. There are many things that you can do to give your baby the best start to life. Talk to your midwife, child health nurse or doctor.

Are different types of alcohol less harmful?

Wine, beer, wine coolers, pre-mixed drinks and spirits all contain alcohol and all types of alcohol can be harmful during pregnancy.

Is it safer to drink alcohol at different times of my pregnancy?

The risk to your baby seems to be higher in the earlier stages of pregnancy. However, from the time your baby is conceived, he/she is always developing, creating brain cells and growing. This continues throughout your pregnancy and after birth, which is why it is best not to drink at any stage of your pregnancy or while breastfeeding.

Is it OK to have a few drinks for a special event?

It is safest not to drink during pregnancy. The risk increases the more you drink but even small amounts of alcohol may be harmful. When you do find yourself at a special event where people will be drinking, have some non-alcoholic drinks prepared and some 'quick comeback' lines ready to use (*see the tips section of this brochure*).

My friend drank while she was pregnant. Why was her baby fine?

The effects of alcohol during pregnancy are very broad and can be different for every woman and baby. Comparing yourself to other women is not a safe way to determine what is best for you and your baby. Many things such as diet, genetics, other drug use, living conditions and mental wellbeing all play a role in the impact that alcohol will have on your baby.

What if I am told by my health professional that I can drink some alcohol?

The national alcohol guidelines are based on the latest research and have been developed to reduce the risk of harm from alcohol to both you and your baby. The guidelines recommend if you are pregnant, planning a pregnancy or breastfeeding, it is safest NOT to drink alcohol.

Drinking alcohol after the birth of your baby

Alcohol can affect your coordination and reaction time and can cause drowsiness. When you or your baby's carer has these effects, your baby may be at increased risk of injury. The national alcohol guidelines recommend that not drinking is the safest option when supervising or caring for children. Drinking alcohol and having baby sleep in your bed is not recommended, as alcohol can cause deep sleep and reduce your responsiveness to your baby. Sharing a bed with your baby while under the influence of alcohol increases risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and fatal sleeping accidents.

Breastfeeding is the best option for your baby

The national alcohol guidelines recommend not drinking alcohol while breastfeeding. When you drink alcohol it enters your breast milk and within 30-60 minutes your breast milk has the same blood alcohol level as you do. In babies up to three months old, alcohol takes longer to leave their system.

Research has shown that even small amounts of alcohol in your breast milk can affect your baby. During the first years of life, your baby's brain is still developing at a very rapid rate and drinking alcohol while breastfeeding can affect your baby's brain development. Alcohol can change the smell of breast milk and reduce your milk supply. This can make your baby fussy and slow to feed, disturb sleep and may make your baby drowsy. Any drug that makes a baby drowsy increases the risk of SIDS and fatal sleeping accidents.

If you are going to drink and breastfeed try to avoid drinking alcohol in the first month until baby's feeding skills are well established. You can also try alternatives such as expressing milk before drinking alcohol so that your baby has a supply ready to go. It is advisable not to drink alcohol immediately before you breastfeed, wait 2-3 hours before feeding.

It is important to stop drinking alcohol as soon as you know you are pregnant. Congratulations if you have stopped already.

Support is available

If you are finding it difficult to stop drinking, or you have any questions, you can talk to:

- your midwife or doctor
- your child health nurse.

Or contact:

Alcohol & Drug Information Service (ADIS)

FREECALL: 1800 177 833 (Charges apply from mobile phones)

Queensland Health

13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84) or visit www.health.qld.gov.au/13health/

Alcohol and Drug Foundation Qld

(07) 3834 0200 or visit <http://www.adfq.org/>

Australian Drug Information Network

www.adin.com.au

Australian Breastfeeding Association

www.breastfeeding.asn.au

Department of Health and Ageing

www.alcohol.gov.au

Queensland Health Breastfeeding

– information for mothers and families

www.health.qld.gov.au/breastfeeding/mother_familiesh.asp

Tobacco and Alcohol Branch

Preventative Health Directorate

Division of the Chief Health Officer

PO Box 2368, Fortitude Valley BC 4006

tel (+61)(07)3329 9833

atodsweb@health.qld.gov.au

www.health.qld.gov.au/atod/

Alcohol use during pregnancy and breastfeeding



Mum, if you drink alcohol, so do I

For more information call: 24 hour national breastfeeding helpline 1800 MUM 2 MUM (1800 686 268)



National alcohol guidelines recommend if you are pregnant, planning a pregnancy or breastfeeding it is safest NOT to drink alcohol.

These guidelines were developed by the National Health and Medical Research Council and are based on the latest and best available research.



Alcohol and pregnancy

Drinking alcohol while pregnant can harm your baby. The level of alcohol that is harmful is not known. However, the more alcohol you drink the higher the risk of serious, life-long health problems for your baby. Even small amounts of alcohol may be harmful. When the alcohol crosses from you to your baby, your baby will have close to the same blood-alcohol level as you. The level of risk to your baby depends on many things including:

- the amount of alcohol you drink
- how often you drink
- the stage of your pregnancy
- other personal and lifestyle factors.

Drinking alcohol regularly and/or in large amounts while you're pregnant increases the chance of miscarriage, stillbirth and having a premature birth. Drinking alcohol while pregnant increases the risk to your baby developing a wide range of physical, mental, behavioural and learning disabilities. The possible damage to your baby varies. Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is the name given to a range of problems caused by drinking alcohol while pregnant. Serious problems that may result include brain damage, lower intelligence and facial and birth defects. As these babies get older, they can have difficulties developing properly, problems with memory, attention disorders, and troubles with relationships.

The effects of alcohol on your baby can vary considerably. Examples of the wide range of physical, mental and developmental effects include:

Low birthweight

A smaller baby is more likely to become distressed and labour may be more complicated. Low birthweight babies are more likely to develop health problems in infancy and childhood.

Brain

Alcohol affects the growth, structure and function of your baby's brain. Damage can cause learning difficulties, low intelligence, attention issues and hyperactivity.

Central nervous system

Damage to the central nervous system

Kidney

Damage

Heart

Heart problems

Eyes

Vision problems

Face

Abnormalities

Ears

Hearing problems

Head

Smaller size

Bones and limbs

Not formed properly

When a pregnant woman drinks, the alcohol crosses through the placenta into the baby's blood stream. So when you drink, so does your baby

Alcohol use can also be harmful to your health:

- **miscarriage, stillbirth**
- **increase risk of accident and injury possibly causing premature labour and birth**
- **brain** – Alcohol may cause brain injury. It also increases the chance of depression and anxiety
- **throat, mouth and oesophagus** – Cancer
- **stomach** – Bleeding, ulcers, nausea, vomiting
- **pancreas** – Diabetes
- **breast** – Cancer
- **heart** – Heart disease
- **kidney** – Kidney failure
- **liver** – Liver cancer, Cirrhosis (Liver disease).

Tips for not drinking alcohol while you're pregnant

- Replace things that usually involve drinking alcohol. There are plenty of great places you can go or things to do that don't involve alcohol. Such as:
 - » spending time in nature (parks or the beach)
 - » going to markets
 - » going to the movies
 - » seeing an exhibition at a gallery/library/museum
 - » taking up a hobby
 - » pampering yourself
 - » doing exercise (yoga or swimming).
- Swap from alcoholic drinks to: water, soda water, and mocktails (non-alcoholic cocktails). When you know that you will be in a situation where alcohol will be present, be prepared by bringing your own non-alcoholic drinks.
- Counselling can help you make the transition from drinking by exploring personal issues and triggers for drinking, and managing stress.

Sometimes it can be difficult to know what to say when you are offered an alcoholic drink. Some quick comeback lines for saying "no thank you" to alcohol are:

- "No thank you, my baby is too young to drink alcohol"
- "No thank you, when I drink alcohol so does my baby"
- "No thank you, I am pregnant"
- "No thank you, I'll have a soda water please".

Quick comeback lines for saying "no thank you" to alcohol when you are not ready to tell people you are pregnant:

- "No thank you, I'm on a health kick"
- "No thank you, I'm the designated driver"
- "No thank you, I'm having a break from drinking this week".