

# Pregnancy and Alcohol Use

There is NO safe amount or kind of alcohol to take at ANY stage of pregnancy. It is safest NOT to drink alcohol when you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant. Your baby's brain and nervous system develop all throughout pregnancy. Even from the very start of pregnancy, alcohol can have serious and lasting effects on the health of your baby.

There are a number of risks to your developing baby if you drink alcohol when you are pregnant. A primary risk is **Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)** which is a term used to describe a range of health and behavioural problems affecting babies whose mothers drank alcohol during pregnancy. FASD is the leading known cause of developmental disability in children and includes, lifelong physical, mental, behavioural and learning disabilities.

## WHICH DRINKS ARE HARMFUL?

There is no safe kind of alcohol to drink during pregnancy. All types of alcohol, including beer, wine, hard liquor, coolers and ciders, can harm your baby. Please see the Canadian Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking guidelines in the Resources section.

## WHAT IF I DRANK ALCOHOL BEFORE I KNEW I WAS PREGNANT?

If you've missed your period think about reducing how much you drink or stop drinking until you find out if you're pregnant. If you did drink and find out you're pregnant, it's important to realize it's never too late to stop drinking. Every effort you make to reduce the amount of alcohol you drink or to stop drinking reduces the risk of harm to your developing baby.

## WHAT ELSE CAN I DO TO MAKE SURE I HAVE A HEALTHY PREGNANCY?

As well as not drinking alcohol, there are other steps you can take to be healthy and to protect your developing baby:

- + Regularly see your doctor, nurse or midwife.
- + Eat healthy food according to Canada's Food Guide.
- + Cut down and stop your use of cigarettes and other drugs.
- + Balance rest and activity.
- + Reduce your stress. Develop healthy habits to help you relax and deal with stress. For example, deep breathing, meditation, yoga, going for walks or taking part in other physical activities, having a warm bath, or talking with a supportive friend or family member.
- + Ask you health care provider for community support.

## IF YOU FEEL YOU HAVE A PROBLEM WITH ALCOHOL

### Prepare for Prenatal and Health Care Visits

Some women find it hard to talk about their alcohol use with their health care providers. It can help to write down your questions before your visit. It may also be helpful to bring a person with you for support such as a friend, partner, or community support worker. Getting early and regular prenatal care is an important step to a healthy pregnancy.

### HOW CAN OTHERS OFFER SUPPORT?

Many women are more likely to avoid alcohol if they are supported to do so. Partners, family and friends can all play an important role by providing support in various ways:

#### Communicate

- + Tell her that you care about her as well as the baby.
- + Let her share her feelings.
- + Be sincere, caring and non-judgmental.
- + Tell family, friends and anyone offering her alcohol that there is no known safe time, safe amount or safe type of alcohol you can drink during pregnancy.

#### Assist

- + Offer practical support. For example, help her with transportation to appointments or to treatment, or offer childcare for her other children.
- + Offer to go with her to her next appointment with her health care provider to learn more about ways to support her.
- + Enjoy activities without alcohol. For example, go to the movies or take a walk or take part in other physical activities.

- + Take a 'pause' from alcohol during the pregnancy. Avoid drinking around her and in social situations when you are together.
- + Offer her non-alcoholic drinks and bring non-alcoholic drinks to social events.

#### Encourage

- + Recognize her efforts and celebrate small successes.
- + Offer to work through problems and barriers to change together.
- + Help reduce the stress in her life. Ask her about what she might find helpful to reduce her stress.
- + Ask if there are any other ways you can support her to have a healthy pregnancy.

### RELEVANT RESOURCES

- + For more information on FASD, see HealthLinkBC at <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/fetal-alcohol-spectrum-disorder>
- + For information on a standard drink, see Canadian Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking guidelines at <https://www.ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2019-04/2012-Canada-Low-Risk-Alcohol-Drinking-Guidelines-Brochure-en.pdf>
- + For more information on having a healthy pregnancy, see [www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/healthy-living/healthy-pregnancy.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/healthy-living/healthy-pregnancy.html)

## TO LEARN MORE ASK

- + Your family doctor.
- + Your **Local Public Health Unit**. For contact information and to find the services that are available in your area, search the HealthLink BC Services and Resources Directory at [www.healthlinkbc.ca/find](http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/find) or call 8-1-1. When you call the public health unit ask for a public health nurse or the mental health and addictions team.
- + **An Alcohol Counselor**.  
BC Alcohol and Drug Information and Referral Service is available 24 hours per day for information on where counseling is available in your area. Lower Mainland/ Greater Vancouver 604 660-9382; Outside Lower Mainland, toll-free in B.C. 1 800 663-1441.
- + **Pregnancy Outreach Programs**.  
Offer support to pregnant women in communities across B.C. To find a program in your area, visit BC Association of Pregnancy Outreach Programs at [www.bcapop.ca](http://www.bcapop.ca), call your local public health unit, or call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1.

## RECOMMENDED FOLLOW UP

- Follow up with your primary care provider in \_\_\_ days.

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Find this information sheet on the BC Emergency Medicine Network website:

[www.bcemn.ca/clinical\\_resource/pregnancy-and-alcohol-use/](http://www.bcemn.ca/clinical_resource/pregnancy-and-alcohol-use/)