

Tips

- Have a good support network around you to help you during your pregnancy
- Ask your partner to stop or cut down on their drinking, particularly if you are still trying to conceive
- Stay as active as you can, continuing with your regular hobbies and interests
- If a lot of your time was previously spent socialising and drinking, then look for new hobbies you will enjoy or meet your friends at a cafe rather than a bar
- If you are going out when pregnant then choose fruit juices or non-alcoholic alternatives
- Make sure you look after yourself and your unborn child by eating healthily and exercising, as well as ensuring you don't smoke or take other harmful drugs

If you're worried about your alcohol consumption

Pregnant mothers should always consult with their health professional (e.g. your doctor or midwife) if they have any concerns regarding their alcohol consumption, as they will be able to offer you the appropriate information and advice.



Have a good support network around you to help you during your pregnancy

For general information on alcohol and support services go to www.drinkhelp.ie



DrinkHelp.ie 

 Coombe Women & Infants University Hospital
Ospidéal Ollscoille Ban agus Náionán an Chúim
Excellence in the Care of Women and Babies
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AlcoholAction 
Ireland

www.alcoholireland.ie

CHY 15342

Alcohol and Pregnancy



Should I drink alcohol during my pregnancy?

It is in a child's best interests for a prospective mother not to drink alcohol while pregnant due to the risk of damaging the physical and mental development of the unborn child – damage which can have serious, life-long consequences.

Conflicting advice on alcohol during pregnancy

Pregnant women can often receive conflicting advice, from various sources, about drinking alcohol during pregnancy. This confusion is due, in some part, to the fact that the exact level of alcohol at which harm starts to be caused to the unborn child has not been clearly established, though it is known that the risk of damage increases in line with how much you drink.

This lack of clarity is another good reason to avoid alcohol completely, because as **there is no known "safe" level of alcohol during pregnancy** then the safest thing to do is not drink at all. What is very clear is that there are no benefits for the unborn child from exposure to alcohol, just risks.



When you drink alcohol, so does your unborn child

How does alcohol affect an unborn child?

When you drink alcohol, so does your unborn child. During pregnancy alcohol passes from the mother's bloodstream through the placenta and into the baby's bloodstream, where it can affect its development.

It takes a woman's liver about 90 minutes to break down just one unit of alcohol. The unborn child does not have a fully developed liver or the capacity to process alcohol like an adult and the placenta does not act as a barrier to protect it from the alcohol passing directly into its blood stream.

Although alcohol is advertised through the use of risk-free, positive messages and is sold in supermarkets, petrol stations and convenience stores as if it were just another grocery, it is important to remember that it is a toxic substance.

What are the risks involved in drinking during pregnancy?

Alcohol consumption can cause problems for the development of the unborn child in the womb. Damage to the unborn child from alcohol takes a number of forms and can show up as behavioural, social, learning and attention difficulties in childhood, adolescence and throughout adulthood. As such, there can be lifelong consequences for the physical and mental health of an unborn child exposed to alcohol in the womb.

Drinking during pregnancy carries a risk of **Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS)** and **Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)**.

Children born with FAS have been exposed to high levels of alcohol throughout the pregnancy and can experience problems with their growth, facial defects, as well as life-long learning and behavioural problems.

FASD refers to the wide range of less obvious – and more common – effects of drinking alcohol during pregnancy. Although children with FASD can look healthy and normal, they can have issues such as sight and hearing difficulties, problems paying attention and following simple directions, as well as other learning difficulties.

Drinking heavily during pregnancy can also increase the chances of complications during pregnancy and childbirth, as well as increasing the risk of premature delivery, miscarriage and stillbirth.

What if I was drinking alcohol before I knew I was pregnant?

We do not have evidence of significant risk from a small amount of alcohol intake in the early weeks of pregnancy but because it is still to be established when and how harm begins, we recommend that you stop drinking for the duration of your pregnancy from once you plan a pregnancy or, if unplanned, from once you know you are pregnant. Also, the sooner you stop drinking, the better it will be for you and your unborn child. However, drinking heavily on regular occasions during the early stages of pregnancy can be harmful to the unborn child.

As you may be unaware of your pregnancy for some time, if you are **trying to conceive** or feel you may be pregnant then it's best to avoid drinking alcohol until you are sure you're not pregnant. It's also important to remember that, if planning a pregnancy, alcohol can have an adverse affect on both you and your partner's fertility.

If you are trying to conceive or feel you may be pregnant then it's best to avoid drinking alcohol

