

Pregnancy and Alcohol Use

What are the risks of drinking during pregnancy?

There are a number of risks to your developing baby if you drink alcohol when you are pregnant.

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, also known as FASD, is the name for the range of harms caused by alcohol use during pregnancy. These harms can include birth defects, slow growth, brain damage, and vision and hearing problems.

How much alcohol is risky?

There is no known safe level of alcohol use during pregnancy, so it is safest not to drink at all when you are pregnant or when you are planning on becoming pregnant.

The potential for alcohol use to harm a developing baby is influenced by the mother's overall health, how much alcohol is used, use of other drugs or medications at the same time, genetics and many other factors.

A drink means:

Beer, cider or cooler <i>5% alcohol</i>	one 12 oz. bottle (341 ml)
Wine <i>12% alcohol</i>	one 5 oz. glass (142 ml)
Hard liquor (vodka, rye, gin, rum, etc.) <i>40% alcohol</i>	one 1.5 oz shot (43 ml) (straight or in a mixed drink)

(Note: 1 Canadian standard drink = 17.05 ml or 13.45g of ethanol)

Is there any safe time to drink alcohol during pregnancy?

There is no safe time to drink alcohol during pregnancy. The baby's brain and nervous system develop all throughout pregnancy.

Which drinks are harmful?

All drinks with alcohol can be harmful to your developing baby. Alcohol is in beer, wine, hard liquor, coolers and ciders.

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

It is not uncommon that pregnant women may drink alcohol before they realize they are pregnant. If you did drink, it is important to stop drinking alcohol during pregnancy.

Quitting drinking and looking after your own health are the best ways to ensure that your baby is healthy. It is never too late to cut down and quit drinking.

What else can I do to reduce the risks?

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

- Get plenty of rest
- 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
- Reduce your stress. You can reduce stress by going for walks or taking part in other physical activities, taking a warm bath, or talking with a supportive friend or family member.

How can I prepare for medical 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 regular medical care is an important step.

How can others offer support?

Partners, families and friends play an important role in supporting a woman to stop drinking during pregnancy. Support can be provided 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

Assist

- Offer practical support, including helping with transportation to appointments or treatment
- Offer to care for other children
- Enjoy activities without alcohol – for example, go to the movies or take a walk or take part in other physical activities
- Spend time with people who don't drink
- Bring non-alcoholic drinks for outings

Encourage

- Recognize her efforts and celebrate small successes
- Offer to work through problems and barriers to change together
- Ask if there are any other ways you can support her

Where can I get more information and help?

There are various services to support you to cut down and stop drinking.

Contact Your Local Public Health Unit

For contact information and to find out the services that are available in your area go to www.health.gov.bc.ca/socsec. When you call ask for the mental health and addictions team.

Contact 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

Motherisk Alcohol and Substance Use Helpline

Offers information on the use of alcohol and other drugs during pregnancy and while breastfeeding

Toll-free: 1-877-327-4636 or visit

www.Motherisk.org

QuitNow Services

You can get help to quit smoking any time of the day or night – free of charge

Call 1-877-455-2233 or go to www.quitnow.ca

Pregnancy Outreach Programs

Offer support to pregnant women in communities across B.C. To find a program in your area, visit the BC Association of Pregnancy Outreach Programs website at www.bcapop.ca, or call your local public health unit.

For more information on FASD, see HealthLink BC File [#38e Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder](#)

For more HealthLink BC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles or your local public health unit.

Click on www.HealthLinkBC.ca or call **8-1-1** for non-emergency health information and services in B.C.

For deaf and hearing-impaired assistance, call 7-1-1 in B.C.

Translation services are available in more than 130 languages on request.