



## 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 (FASD) 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.

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

### How much alcohol is risky?

There is no known safe amount of alcohol at any stage of pregnancy. It is safest not to drink at all when you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant.

### Is there any safe time to drink alcohol during pregnancy?

There is no safe time to drink alcohol during pregnancy. 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.

### 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. Binge drinking, drinking more than 3 standard drinks at any one time, and regular heavy drinking are very harmful to you and your developing baby. See the Canadian Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking guidelines at

[www.ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2019-04/2012-Canada-Low-Risk-Alcohol-Drinking-Guidelines-Brochure-en.pdf](http://www.ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2019-04/2012-Canada-Low-Risk-Alcohol-Drinking-Guidelines-Brochure-en.pdf) (PDF 1.40 MB) to find out what a standard drink means.

### 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

For more information on having a healthy pregnancy, see [www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/pregnancy/guide-healthy-pregnancy.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/pregnancy/guide-healthy-pregnancy.html)

## How can I 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

## Where can I get more information and help?

If you need help to to cut down and stop drinking, it’s important to talk to your health care provider, friends, family or a counselor to get the assistance and support you need. For more information or a referral to services, visit:

### 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**.