

## Pregnancy and alcohol use

### What are the risks of drinking during pregnancy?

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

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a lifelong disability that affects a range of health and behavioural problems in individuals who were exposed to alcohol in the womb. The effects of FASD include problems with motor skills, physical health, learning, memory, attention, communication and social skills. Each individual with FASD is unique and has areas of strengths as well as challenges in these areas.

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, planning to become pregnant or having barrier free sex.

### 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.

### Which drinks are harmful?

There is no safe kind of alcohol to drink during pregnancy. All types of alcohol, including beer, wine, spirits, coolers and ciders can harm the fetus.



Drinking more than 3 standard drinks at one time (binge drinking), and regular drinking in pregnancy (everyday) are most harmful.

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

If you've missed your period, it is best to reduce or stop drinking until you find out if you're pregnant. If you did drink and learn after that you're pregnant, it's important to know 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 during pregnancy:

- Regularly see your doctor, nurse, or midwife
- Eat healthy food
- Reduce or stop your use of cigarettes and other drugs
- Balance rest and activity
- Reduce your stress. Find healthy ways to 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 pregnant women and people find it hard to talk about alcohol use with their health care providers. Your care provider is there to answer questions and help you to make informed and healthy choices. 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 pregnant women and people 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**

- Show that you care about them as well as the baby
- Encourage sharing of feelings
- Be sincere, caring, and non-judgmental
- Tell family, friends, and anyone who may be in a position to offer 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 with transportation to appointments or to treatment, or offer childcare for other children
- Offer to go along to the next prenatal appointment with their health care

provider to learn more about ways to provide support

- Enjoy activities without alcohol. For example, go to the movies or take a walk or take part in other physical activities
- Go alcohol free yourself during the pregnancy. Or avoid drinking around them and in social situations when you are together
- Offer non-alcoholic drinks and bring non-alcoholic drinks to social events

#### **Encourage**

- Recognize any efforts to reduce or stop drinking and celebrate small successes
- Offer to work through problems and barriers to change together
- Help reduce life stressors. Ask about what they might find helpful to reduce stress
- Ask if there are any other ways you can provide support for having a healthy pregnancy

### **Where can I get more information and help?**

If you need help to stop drinking during pregnancy, 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** - 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 someone from the mental health and addictions team.

**Alcohol and Drug Information and Referral Service (ADIRS)** is available 24 hours per day for information on where counselling 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 and people 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), or ask your local public health unit, or call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1.

**SmartMom** is a Canadian prenatal education program that provides trustworthy educational text messages to help guide you through the weeks of your pregnancy [www.smartmomcanada.ca/](http://www.smartmomcanada.ca/).

**Wellness Together Canada** is an online service that offers free mental health and substance use support that is private and confidential, and is available 24/7. It offers self guided courses, texting support, informational resources, one-to-one counselling, and online coaching and communities of support. <https://wellnesstogether.ca/en-CA>.

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