

FACT SHEET:

# Alcohol & Pregnancy

If you're pregnant, you may be feeling bombarded with advice and opinions from lots of different people. An important factor to consider in your pregnancy is how alcohol will affect you and your developing baby.

Over the years there have been many mixed reports about drinking alcohol during pregnancy. Government advice now states that pregnant women should avoid alcohol altogether.

## What happens to my baby when I drink alcohol?

One thing is clear, if you are pregnant and take a drink - a glass of wine, a beer or a cocktail - your unborn child takes the same drink. When you drink, the alcohol crosses from your bloodstream through the placenta into your baby's blood. This can put your unborn child at risk, as alcohol interferes with his/her ability to get enough oxygen and nourishment for normal cell development in the brain and other body organs.

Research has shown that a developing foetus has very little tolerance for alcohol and infants born to mothers who drink during pregnancy can have serious problems.

## Risks of drinking during pregnancy

Most women are aware that heavy alcohol drinking during pregnancy will harm their foetus, potentially causing life altering birth defects. It can also lead to miscarriage, premature delivery, or stillbirth. In the first three months of pregnancy, heavy drinking can damage the developing organs and nervous system of the foetus.

Although many women are already aware of the risks of heavy drinking, many do not realise that moderate or even light drinking may also harm the foetus. In fact, no level of alcohol use during pregnancy has been proven safe. Therefore, the consensus among healthcare professionals is that pregnant women are far better abstaining from alcohol completely.

# Foetal Alcohol Syndrome

If you continue to drink alcohol when you are pregnant, you put your baby at risk of developing Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD), of which the most severe is Foetal Alcohol Syndrome which causes mental and physical birth defects. The condition is a life long one, and children can have a range of symptoms, including low birth weight, facial abnormalities and learning and behavioural difficulties.

## Before pregnancy

Women often don't know they are pregnant for a few weeks or sometimes longer. If you think you may be pregnant or are attempting to become pregnant, it is recommended that you don't drink alcohol at this time.

## After pregnancy - breastfeeding

When breastfeeding, your baby will consume most of what you eat and drink. This means that if you've had alcohol, you will pass this on to your baby when breastfeeding. It is advisable not to drink at all during this stage, however, if you do choose to drink keep to very minimal amounts. Check with your midwife or health visitor about expressing.

## Alcohol and pregnancy - some tips

- If you are trying to get pregnant, try cutting down your units gradually. Start off by reducing your drinking each day, then try having a few alcohol free days a week.
- Ask your partner to cut down drinking as well. This is important if you're trying to get pregnant as alcohol lowers sperm counts and heavy drinking can cause temporary impotence.
- Be assertive. If you're out with friends, you may be under pressure to drink, especially if they don't know you are pregnant yet. Volunteer to be designated driver, tell them that you're on a health kick, or simply stick to soft drinks.
- Change your routine. If you often spend evenings in the pub with friends or drinking wine over dinner, take up a new hobby or class. For example you could try pregnancy yoga classes as a fun way to meet other expectant mums.
- Treat your taste buds by making your own delicious non-alcoholic cocktails. Blend fruit juices together or add flavoured syrups to sparkling water.
- If you didn't know you were pregnant and were drinking more than the recommended limit during that time, don't panic, speak to your GP or midwife about any concerns you have.



# Taking the next step

For support and further information available in Fife or Tayside please contact:

## FASS Alcohol Support Service

Call us in confidence on

**01592 206200**

Access online help and support

**[www.fassaction.org.uk](http://www.fassaction.org.uk)**

**[f](#) @FASSFife | [t](#) @FASSFife**

## Tayside Council on Alcohol

Call us in confidence on

**01382 456012**

Access online help and support

**[www.alcoholtayside.com](http://www.alcoholtayside.com)**

Other National information and support can be accessed through the following organisations:

**Alcohol Focus Scotland:** [www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk](http://www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk)

**Alcoholics Anonymous:** Helpline: 0800 9177 650 | [www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk](http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk)

**Drinkline (Advice and support):** 0800 731 4314

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