

Pregnancy and alcohol use

Alcohol use is harmful to health. The less you drink, the lower your risk. There is no known safe amount of alcohol use when pregnant, trying to get pregnant, or when there is a possibility that you may become pregnant.

What are the risks of drinking during pregnancy?

There are many risks for you and your developing baby if you drink alcohol when you are pregnant. Alcohol goes into your bloodstream. Inside the womb, the placenta provides oxygen and nutrients to a developing baby. The alcohol reaches your baby by passing through the placenta. Alcohol can cause birth defects or abnormalities in the developing fetus. Alcohol use in pregnancy can also lead to health, learning, behavioural and social effects with lifelong impacts.

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a lifelong disability that affects the brain and body of individuals who are exposed to alcohol in the womb. The effects of FASD include problems with motor skills, physical health, learning, memory, attention, communication and social skills. Individuals with FASD will need extra support to succeed with many parts of their daily lives.

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

Drinking less or no alcohol is also better for your health. There is a continuum of risk associated with alcohol use and the less you drink, the lower your risk. Not drinking alcohol has many health benefits, including better sleep and better mental health.

Females can experience greater harm from lesser amounts of alcohol than males, due to differences in their bodies including their physiology, anatomy and hormones.

For more information about alcohol and health, visit [Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health](#).

How much alcohol is risky?

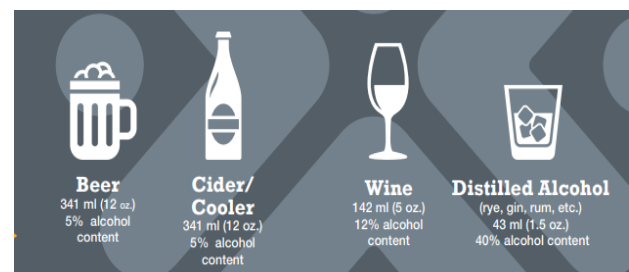
There is no known safe amount of alcohol at any stage of pregnancy. It is safest not to drink at all when you are pregnant, planning to become pregnant or having sex that could result in pregnancy.

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 throughout pregnancy.

Which drinks are harmful?

Any alcoholic drink is potentially harmful. There is no safe kind of alcohol to drink during pregnancy. All types of alcohol, including beer, wine, spirits, mixed drinks, coolers and ciders can harm the fetus. Drinking more than 3 standard drinks at one time (binge drinking) and regular drinking in pregnancy (most days) put you and your baby at the greatest risk of harm. A standard drink is:



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

If you think there is a chance you may be pregnant or 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 you and 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 protect your health and the health of your developing baby during pregnancy:

- Regularly see your doctor, nurse or midwife
- Eat healthy food
- Balance rest and activity
- Reduce or stop your use of cigarettes and other drugs
- 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, visit www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/healthy-pregnancy/healthy-pregnancy-guide.html.

How can I prepare for prenatal and health care visits?

Some pregnant people find it hard to talk about alcohol use with their health care providers. Your health care provider is there to answer questions and help you 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?

Pregnant people are more likely to avoid alcohol if they feel supported. Partners, family and friends can provide 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 offer you alcohol, that there is no known safe time, amount or 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 during their 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

Is alcohol safe to use while breastfeeding?

There is no known safe amount of alcohol use while breastfeeding. Alcohol enters breastmilk within 30 to 60 minutes of drinking, which can expose infants to alcohol if they nurse during that time. Alcohol use can also negatively impact breastfeeding. It can cause a decrease in milk production, an early end to breastfeeding and affect infant sleep patterns. Not using alcohol while breastfeeding is safest for the baby.

Where can I get more information and help?

If you need help to stop drinking during pregnancy, talk to your health care provider, friends, family or counsellor to get the assistance and support you need.

Pregnant people with an alcohol use disorder require more specialized care due to the risk of withdrawal, which can harm gestational parent and baby.

For more information or to get a referral to services, visit:

Your Local Public Health Unit: To find the services that are available in your area, search the HealthLink BC Directory at www.healthlinkbc.ca/find-care/find-health-services 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 24/7 for information on where counselling is available in your area. Call 604-660-9382 in the Lower Mainland or toll-free in B.C. at 1-800-663-1441.

Pregnancy Outreach Programs offer support to pregnant people in communities across B.C. To find a program in your area, visit BC Association of Pregnancy Outreach Programs at www.bcapop.ca, ask your local public health unit or call HealthLink BC at **8-1-1**.

SmartParent is a Canadian prenatal education program that provides trustworthy educational text messages to help guide you through the weeks of your pregnancy <https://smartparentcanada.ca>.