

# Drinking while pregnant

For women who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, not drinking is the safest choice.

Like many drugs, alcohol crosses the placenta (the afterbirth) to the growing baby and can cause miscarriage, premature labour, small babies more prone to illness, slow growth and development, and stillbirth. Talk to your midwife or doctor about your alcohol use as early as possible in your pregnancy and seek advice to help you to safely stop drinking.

## Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder

Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD) is a term used to describe the range of effects that exposure to alcohol during pregnancy can have on a fetus and developing child. These effects include delayed development and behavioural disorders.

Fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) is a less common condition caused by excessive and regular alcohol use during pregnancy. Babies with FAS are smaller than average, have abnormal facial features, and impaired intellectual and physical development.

## After the birth of your baby

If your doctor or midwife has concerns about your baby's health, he or she will refer your baby to a paediatrician (doctor for babies). Babies exposed to alcohol use during pregnancy may experience alcohol withdrawal symptoms and need supportive care and treatment.

## Breastfeeding

If you are breastfeeding, it's best not to drink alcohol.

If you drink alcohol, it passes into your blood and then into your breast milk. The amount of alcohol in your breast milk is similar to the amount in your blood. If you choose to drink alcohol, allow two alcohol-free hours before breastfeeding for each standard drink you have had.

If you are planning to drink alcohol for a special occasion, consider expressing and storing your breast milk ahead of time. You can then feed your child the expressed breast milk while you wait for your breast milk to be free of alcohol.

### *Did you know<sup>1</sup>:*

- 47% of women unknowingly consumed alcohol while pregnant
- 19% of women knowingly consumed alcohol while pregnant

## Sudden infant death syndrome

Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) is the sudden and unexpected death of a baby for no known reason. It is one of the most common causes of death of infants in Australia, between birth and the age of one<sup>2</sup>.

The risk of SIDS is greater if you smoke or use alcohol or other drugs during pregnancy or after your baby is born. If you plan to drink alcohol or have been drinking, always make sure there is an adult who is not affected by alcohol or other drugs available to care for your baby. For more information, talk to your midwife, health worker or doctor.

If you're worried about your drinking, see your doctor or contact the alcohol and other drug service in your state or territory.

## Something for men to consider

Men whose partners are trying to have a baby also need to be aware of how their drinking may affect the chances of their partner falling pregnant. Heavy alcohol consumption can sometimes cause male fertility problems, as well as decreased sex drive and performance.

Adapted from the DrugInfo fact sheet "Pregnancy and alcohol" (2012, [druginfo.adf.org.au/fact-sheets/pregnancy-and-alcohol-web-fact-sheet](http://druginfo.adf.org.au/fact-sheets/pregnancy-and-alcohol-web-fact-sheet)).

<sup>1</sup> Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education 2012, retrieved from <http://www.fare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Alcohol-Consumption-During-Pregnancy-Final.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2013 'Health', retrieved from <http://www.aihw.gov.au/child-health/health/>

# Factsheet

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ALCOHOL AND DRUGS  
IN THE WORKPLACE

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