

What You Should Know About Drinking Alcohol During Pregnancy

D *Drinking alcohol during pregnancy—even light drinking—can have many negative consequences on the developing fetus. Drinking during pregnancy can increase the risk of miscarriage, stillbirth, and low birthweight babies. It can also cause mild to severe birth defects. Women who are pregnant, who are not using effective contraception, or who are considering becoming pregnant in the near future, should completely avoid drinking alcoholic beverages.*

Can I drink any alcoholic beverages when I am pregnant or considering becoming pregnant?

No! Alcohol can pass very quickly to the fetus when a pregnant woman drinks. The fetus is not able to process the alcohol as quickly as the pregnant woman can. The blood alcohol level stays high longer in the developing fetus, which may cause lifelong damage to the baby. While most people know that heavy drinking can cause severe problems, such as Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), many are unaware that even a little amount of alcohol can cause substantial problems. No amount of drinking alcohol is safe during pregnancy—not even a bottle of beer, a wine cooler, a glass of wine, or a shot of hard liquor.

What are the risks of drinking alcohol during pregnancy?

Drinking alcohol during pregnancy increases the risk of having a miscarriage or stillbirth, or of having a low birthweight baby (weighing less than 5½ lbs). It can also cause birth defects, which together are categorized as “fetal alcohol spectrum disorders”—ranging from mental retardation; learning, behavioral or emotional problems; to heart, facial, or other organ defects.

What is fetal alcohol syndrome?

Fetal alcohol syndrome is an incurable combination of physical and mental defects caused by exposing the fetus to alcohol. Babies with FAS are typically very small at birth, and don't catch up as they age. They

Problems Associated With Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders

- Mental retardation
- Birth defects
- Abnormal facial features
- Growth problems
- Emotional/ behavioral problems
- Sight/hearing problems
- Learning disabilities
- Impulsivity/hyperactivity



have specific facial features, including small eyes and a thin upper lip. Their organs—especially the heart and brain—may not form correctly. These babies often have some degree of mental disability, poor coordination, sight and hearing problems, a short attention span, and emotional/behavioral problems. Studies have shown that children who were exposed to moderate drinking during pregnancy are at higher risk for psychiatric problems, impulsivity, hyperactivity, and behavioral problems. FAS is completely preventable—by not drinking alcohol during pregnancy.

What if I have been drinking and I am pregnant?

If you are already pregnant—or if you are trying to get pregnant—STOP DRINKING NOW! You should certainly avoid binge drinking (3+ drinks at one time) but must also avoid even an occasional drink while you are pregnant or breastfeeding. If you need assistance to stop drinking, ask your health care professional to help you find an alcohol treatment program.