Drinking and Your Pregnancy

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
National Institutes of Health
National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

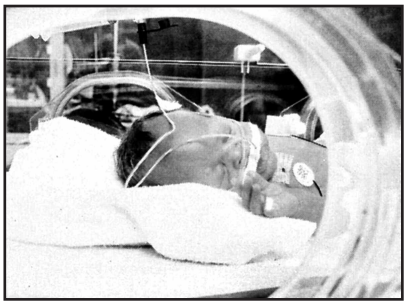
in cooperation with
National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

When You Are Pregnant…

Drinking Can Hurt Your Baby

When you are pregnant, your baby grows inside you. Everything you eat and drink while you are pregnant affects your baby. If you drink ***alcohol,*** it can hurt your baby's growth. Your baby may have physical and behavioral problems that can last for the rest of his or her life. Children born with the most serious problems caused by alcohol have ***fetal alcohol syndrome.***

Children with fetal alcohol syndrome may:



- Be born small.
- Have problems eating and sleeping.
- Have problems seeing and hearing.
- Have trouble following directions and learning how to do simple things.
- Have trouble paying attention and learning in school.
- Need special teachers and schools.
- Have trouble getting along with others and controlling their behavior.
- Need medical care all their lives.

Here are some questions you may have about alcohol and drinking while you are pregnant.

1. Can I drink alcohol if I am pregnant?

No. Do not drink alcohol when you are pregnant. Why? Because when you drink alcohol, so does your baby. Think about it. Everything you drink, your baby also drinks.

2. Is any kind of alcohol safe to drink during pregnancy?

No. Drinking any kind of alcohol when you are pregnant can hurt your baby. Alcoholic drinks are beer, wine, wine coolers, liquor, or mixed drinks. A glass of wine, a can of beer, and a mixed drink all have about the same amount of alcohol.

3. What if I drank during my last pregnancy and my baby was fine?

Every pregnancy is different. Drinking alcohol may hurt one baby more than another. You could have one child that is born healthy, and another child that is born with problems.

4. Will these problems go away?

No. These problems will last for a child's whole life. People with severe problems may not be able to take care of themselves as adults. They may never be able to work.

5. What if I am pregnant and have been drinking?

If you drank alcohol before you knew you were pregnant, stop drinking now. You will feel better and your baby will have a good chance to be born healthy. If you want to get pregnant, do not drink alcohol. You may not know you are pregnant right away. Alcohol can hurt a baby even when you are only 1 or 2 months pregnant.

6. How can I stop drinking?

There are many ways to help yourself stop drinking. You do not have to drink when other people drink. If someone gives you a drink, it is OK to say no. Stay away from people or places that make you drink. Do not keep alcohol at home.

If you cannot stop drinking, GET HELP. You may have a disease called ***alcoholism***. There are programs that can help you stop drinking. They are called ***alcohol treatment programs***. Your doctor or nurse can find a program to help you. Even if you have been through a treatment program before, try it again. There are programs just for women.

For help and information

You can get help from a doctor, nurse, social worker, pastor, or clinics and programs near you.

For confidential information, you can contact:

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)
check your local phone book for listings in your area
Internet address: http://www.aa.org

National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD)
244 East 58th Street 4th Floor New York, NY 10022
Phone: (212) 269–7797; Fax: (212) 269–7510
HOPE LINE: (800) NCA–CALL (24-hour Affiliate referral)
Email: national@ncadd.org
Internet address: http://www.ncadd.org

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism
5635 Fishers Lane, MSC 9304
Bethesda, MD 20892–9304
(301) 443–3860; Fax: (301) 480–1726
Internet address: http://www.niaaa.nih.gov

National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome
900 17th Street, NW, Suite 910
Washington, DC 20006
(800) 66–NOFAS; Fax: (202) 466–6456
Internet address: http://www.nofas.org

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
Treatment Facility Locator
(800) 662–HELP
Internet address:http://www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov

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