

How does drinking alcohol during pregnancy affect your baby's health?

Drinking alcohol at any time during pregnancy can cause serious health problems for your baby. Alcohol includes wine, wine coolers, beer and liquor.

When you drink alcohol during pregnancy, the alcohol in your blood quickly passes through the placenta and the umbilical cord to your baby. The placenta grows in your uterus (womb) and supplies the baby with food and oxygen through the umbilical cord. Drinking any amount of alcohol at any time during pregnancy can harm your baby's developing brain and other organs. No amount of alcohol has been proven safe at any time during pregnancy.

There's no safe time to drink alcohol during pregnancy. Alcohol can cause problems for your baby any time during pregnancy, even before you know that you're pregnant. You may be pregnant and not know for 4 to 6 weeks.



Drinking alcohol during pregnancy increases your baby's chances of having these problems:

- **Premature birth.** This is when your baby is born before 37 weeks of pregnancy. Premature babies may have serious health problems at birth and later in life.
- **Brain damage** and problems with growth and development
- **Birth defects**, like heart defects, hearing problems or vision problems. Birth defects are health conditions that are present at birth. Birth defects change the shape or function of one or more parts of the body. They can cause problems in overall health, how the body develops, or in how the body works.
- **Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (also called FASDs).** Children with FASDs may have a range of problems, including intellectual and developmental disabilities. These are problems with how the brain works that can cause a person to have trouble in learning, communicating, taking care of himself or getting along with others. They also may have problems or delays in physical development. FASDs usually last a lifetime. Binge drinking during pregnancy increases your chances of having a baby with FASDs. Binge drinking is when you drink four or more drinks in 2 to 3 hours.
- **Low birthweight (also called LBW).** This is when a baby is born weighing less than 5 pounds, 8 ounces.
- **Miscarriage.** This is when a baby dies in the womb before 20 weeks of pregnancy.
- **Stillbirth.** This is when a baby dies in the womb after 20 weeks of pregnancy.

This information was created and reviewed through a partnership with the UAMS Patient and Family Advisory Councils and the UAMS Center for Health Literacy.

How can you keep your baby safe from alcohol during pregnancy?

If you don't drink alcohol during pregnancy, your baby can't have FASDs or any other health problems caused by alcohol. If you're pregnant or even thinking about getting pregnant, don't drink alcohol.

Some women may drink alcohol during pregnancy and have babies who seem healthy. Some women may have very little alcohol during pregnancy and have babies with serious health conditions. Every pregnancy is different. Alcohol may hurt one baby more than another. The best way to keep your baby safe from problems caused by alcohol during pregnancy is not to drink alcohol when you're pregnant.

If you're pregnant, trying to get pregnant or think you may be pregnant, don't drink alcohol. When you do get pregnant, get regular prenatal care (medical care you get during pregnancy). Tell your health care provider if you need help to stop drinking alcohol.

How can you stop drinking alcohol during pregnancy?

You may want to drink alcohol during pregnancy. Alcohol is often part of social activities, like parties or sports events. You may be used to having a glass of wine with dinner or at the end of a busy day. Giving up alcohol during pregnancy may be hard.

Here are some tips to help you stop drinking alcohol:

- Think about when you usually drink alcohol. Plan to drink other things, like fruity drinks or water. Use a fun straw or put an umbrella in the glass to make it seem more fun.
- Stay away from situations or places where you usually drink, like parties or bars.
- Get rid of all the alcohol in your home.
- Tell your partner and your friends and family that you're not drinking alcohol during pregnancy. Ask them to help and support you.

If you need help to stop drinking, here's what you can do:

- Talk to your health care provider about alcohol treatment programs.
- Join an Alcoholics Anonymous support group.
- Visit the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (also called NCADD) website, or call **1-800-622-2255**.
- Use Substance Abuse Treatment Facility Locator on the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (also called SAMHSA) website or call **1-800-662-4357**.

Go to www.marchofdimes.org for more information.

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