

## Breastfeeding

**Breastfeeding is the best method of feeding your baby. It is also good for your health.**

To safely breastfeed your baby, you may need assistance from a health professional to reduce or cease your alcohol use.

When 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 your blood levels. If you choose to drink alcohol, allow two hours before breastfeeding.

Women who are breastfeeding are advised not to exceed the levels of drinking recommended during pregnancy, and may consider not drinking at all (NHMRC Guidelines 2001).

There is little research evidence available about the effects of drinking alcohol whilst breastfeeding. However, there have been reports of the following effects on babies even when alcohol is consumed at lower levels:

- There may be a reduction in the amount of breast milk you produce. Your baby may not receive enough milk if this occurs
- Your baby may become irritable, feed poorly and may have disturbed sleep patterns.

During the first year of a baby's life, the brain is still developing at a rapid rate. It is possible that drinking above recommended levels can affect a baby's brain development.

If your drinking does exceed the recommended levels, you may consider expressing and discarding your breast milk for one to two hours after you finish drinking.

**Regardless of the time frame, if you feel intoxicated there will still be alcohol in your breast milk.**

## Sudden Infant Death Syndrome

SIDS is the sudden unexpected death of a baby for no known reason. It is the most common cause of death for infants in Australia between birth and the age of one year. The risk of SIDS is greater if you smoke, use drugs and/or alcohol during pregnancy or after your baby is born.

For information, talk to your midwife, health worker or doctor.

### Keeping your baby safe and reducing the risk of SIDS

- Always provide a safe sleeping environment for your baby.
- Always ensure your baby is put to sleep on his/her back.
- Provide a smoke free environment for your baby.
- Do not put your baby to sleep in your bed if you have been drinking alcohol. The risk of SIDS or a sleeping accident is increased under these conditions.
- If you plan to drink alcohol or have been drinking, always ensure there is an adult who is not affected by alcohol or drugs available to care for your baby.
- Ensure that others caring for your baby know how to provide him or her with a safe environment.

## Important numbers

Women's Alcohol and Drug Service	9344 3631
Website	<a href="http://www.rwh.org.au/wads">www.rwh.org.au/wads</a>
Drug Info Line	Free Call – 1300 858 584
24 hour counselling and referral service	
Direct Line	Free Call – 1800 888 236
Royal Women's Hospital Young Mum's Program	9344 2189
Website	<a href="http://www.ypp.org.au">www.ypp.org.au</a>
YSAS (Youth Substance Abuse Service)	9418 1020

## Contact details

8.30am – 5.30pm Monday to Friday

**Women's Alcohol and Drug Service**

264 Cardigan Street Carlton Victoria 3053

Phone 03 9344 3631

Email [womens.ads@rwh.org.au](mailto:womens.ads@rwh.org.au)

Web [www.rwh.org.au/wads](http://www.rwh.org.au/wads)

After hours assistance via RWH emergency department

Phone 03 9344 2000

# Pregnancy and alcohol



If you are pregnant and drink alcohol, the following information may assist you to have a healthy pregnancy.

## There are no known safe levels of alcohol consumption in pregnancy

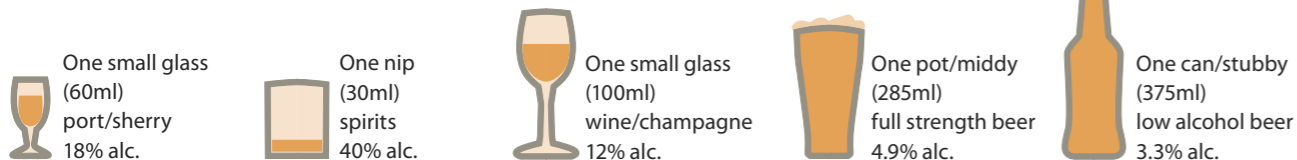
The Australian National Health & Medical Research Council (NHMRC) have made the following recommendations for women who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy:

- Women may consider not drinking alcohol at all
- It is most important not to become intoxicated
- Women who choose to drink should have less than seven standard drinks per week
- Women should have at least two alcohol free days a week
- However, on any one day no more than two standard drinks should be consumed. These drinks should be spread over at least two hours.

Drinking larger quantities at any one time may affect the developing fetal brain.

The risk to your baby appears to be highest in the earlier stages of pregnancy. Reducing or ceasing your alcohol use at any stage of your pregnancy, even late pregnancy, will be of benefit to your baby and your health.

### Standard drink size



## Effects on your pregnancy

Like many drugs, alcohol crosses the placenta (the after birth) to the developing baby and can affect your pregnancy.

- Alcohol use may be associated with the following pregnancy problems:
  - miscarriage
  - prematurity
  - small and sickly babies, due to slow growth in pregnancy
  - stillbirth
- When alcohol consumption exceeds the recommended levels, there is a higher risk of birth defects, also learning difficulties and behavioural problems particularly in school aged children.
- Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) is a rare condition caused by very heavy and regular alcohol use in pregnancy. Babies are smaller than average, have abnormal facial features and impaired development.
- Alcohol use can be associated with poor appetite and nutrition. This can affect your health and your pregnancy.

## Reducing the harm of alcohol use in pregnancy

Talking about your alcohol use can be difficult, particularly when you are pregnant.

- Talk to your midwife or doctor about your alcohol use as early as possible in your pregnancy.
- Information and advice can help you make the necessary changes for a healthy pregnancy.
- To help reduce your alcohol intake try alternating alcoholic drinks with water or non alcoholic drinks. If you drink full strength beer, consider changing to light beer.
- Seek advice from your doctor or a drug and alcohol service to assist you to cease drinking safely.
- Unsupported alcohol withdrawal can be dangerous for your health and your pregnancy.
- Be aware of how much alcohol you drink.
- Keep a diary of your alcohol intake.
- Drink slowly, take small sips.
- Eat before and during drinking.
- Be assertive – say no if you don't want to drink.

## Pregnancy care

- Regular pregnancy care is important to ensure you are healthy and your baby is developing and growing well.
- If your baby appears to be small, a growth ultrasound and monitoring may be organized by your doctor or midwife.
- If you are concerned about poor appetite and/or diet, ask to be referred to a dietician.
- Dietary supplements may be required during your pregnancy and after the birth of your baby. Seek advice from your dietitian, doctor or midwife before starting supplements.

## After the birth of your baby

- If your doctor or midwife has concerns regarding your baby's health, she will refer your baby to a paediatrician (baby doctor).
- Your baby may need to stay in hospital longer than usual to ensure he/she is settled, feeding well and gaining weight.
- Some babies exposed to heavy alcohol use throughout pregnancy may experience alcohol withdrawal symptoms and require supportive care and treatment.

## Drug and alcohol counselling

Pregnancy is a good motivator to reduce or cease alcohol use. Accessing counselling may assist you. Accessing counselling provides the opportunity to:

- Explore personal issues and make positive changes
- Learn new ways to manage stress
- Develop strategies to reduce or stop drinking
- Obtain a referral to support services
- Access information about reducing the harm to yourself and your pregnancy
- Obtain advice about parenting skills.