

Alcohol and pregnancy

Introduction

This leaflet provides information about drinking alcohol in pregnancy and the possible effects on your pregnancy and baby.

When you drink, alcohol reaches the baby through the placenta. Exposure to alcohol increases the risk of miscarriage in the first 3 months and can affect the baby's development at any time during pregnancy.

As researchers do not know **exactly** how much alcohol is safe to drink when you are pregnant, the NHS recommends that pregnant women and women trying to conceive should **avoid** drinking alcohol. However, if you choose to drink, the guidance is 1 to 2 units once or twice a week.

Getting drunk or binge drinking may seriously harm your baby.

Effects on the baby

If you drink heavily when you are pregnant the normal development of your baby is at risk.

Babies may be born with signs and symptoms of Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS).

FAS is a lifelong condition. Children may show a range of symptoms which could include low birth weight, changed facial features, learning and behavioural difficulties as well as physical problems due to damage of the nervous system. Sometimes these babies may look healthy when they are born, but the damage lasts forever.

Effects on mothers

Excessive use of alcohol is associated with high blood pressure, liver disease, pancreatic inflammation and nerve damage. Women who drink heavily may have a poor diet, and problems with lack of vitamins, rest, sleep and relaxation. Excessive alcohol use is

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associated with an increased risk of domestic violence.

Remember: No alcohol is the best choice.

It's never too late to cut down or stop drinking during pregnancy, even a small change can make a big difference.

Units of alcohol

If you didn't know you were pregnant and have been drinking more than the recommended amount of units, talk to your GP or Midwife.

The effects of drinking are different for every woman and her baby, so don't compare yourself with your friends.

After the birth

If your use of alcohol has been excessive during pregnancy, the paediatricians may want to observe your baby for signs of alcohol withdrawal following delivery; this may mean you have to stay in hospital for 72 hours. You will be expected to care for your baby during this time on the postnatal ward.

Feeding your baby

Breast feeding gives your baby the best possible start in life, and the occasional drink is unlikely to harm either of you.

If you do choose to breast feed your baby, it is advisable to keep your limits within those recommended during pregnancy.

If you want to know more about the effects of alcohol when you are feeding your baby speak to your midwife or health visitor.

It is very important not to have your baby sleep with you in bed if you have been drinking and never sleep with your baby on the sofa or in the armchair as this increases the risk of cot death.

Will my baby be referred to social services?

Social services will not automatically be called just because you seek advice about your alcohol use. A number of supportive agencies can

be involved if you need extra support.

Social services will only be involved in your care if there are concerns about the safety of your baby.

Contact information

Turning Point

Cheltenham

Tel: 01242 537570

Monday to Friday, 9:00am to 5:00pm

Forest of Dean

Tel: 01594 820194

Monday to Friday, 9:00am to 5:00pm

Gloucester

Tel: 01452 509500

Monday to Friday, 9:00am to 5:00pm

Stroud

Tel: 01453 847700

Monday to Friday, 9:00am to 5:00pm

Drug and alcohol specialist midwives

Tel: 07890 540240

Tel: 07884 260352

Monday to Friday, 9:00am to 5:00pm

Further information

Alcoholics Anonymous (24 hour service)

Tel: 0845 7697555

Website: www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/

Drink aware

Website: www.drinkaware.co.uk

NHS Choices

Website: www.nhs.uk/Livewell/alcohol/Pages/alcohol-units.aspx

National Organisation for Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (NOFAS-UK)

Tel: 020 8458 5951

Website: www.nofas-uk.org