

# PREGNANCY AND ALCOHOL: A TERRIBLE MIX.

**Did you know the leading cause of intellectual disabilities in young children is 100% preventable?**

Each year more than 50,000 babies are born with alcohol-related damage. Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) is a series of birth defects caused by a woman's drinking alcohol when she is pregnant. FAS causes physical deformations, intellectual disabilities, heart defects, and serious behavioral and learning problems.

No level of alcohol use during pregnancy is known to be safe. Even light drinking during pregnancy can harm the unborn baby. All women who are pregnant, nursing, or trying to become pregnant should stop drinking alcohol to give their children the best chance for a healthy life.

*Some of the worst damage can happen to the fetus when the mother may not even know she is pregnant.*



## RESOURCES

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA):

[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)

National Institute on Drug Abuse:

[www.drugabuse.gov](http://www.drugabuse.gov)

Alcoholics Anonymous:

[www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org)

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## ALCOHOL & PREGNANCY



## Alcohol Affects Unborn Babies

A new baby is so small, it depends on adults for all its needs. When a baby is in its mother's womb, it is called a fetus until it is born. A fetus is even smaller than a baby and can be easily hurt by chemicals.

When a woman drinks alcohol, the alcohol enters her blood. The alcohol quickly reaches the fetus through the umbilical cord.

It takes the tiny fetus's system a lot longer to clear the alcohol. As a result, the fetus's blood alcohol content can be even higher than the mother's and remain higher longer.

Alcohol is toxic to a fetus. It may cause defects as the fetus grows. The more the mother drinks, the more harm may be done. The damage from high levels of alcohol affects the child for a lifetime.



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# Myth vs. Truth

**MYTH:** My sister drank when she was pregnant, and her baby was fine.

**TRUTH:** Some fetuses are more easily hurt by alcohol than others. No one knows which will be most affected. The best choice is to avoid alcohol when you are pregnant or trying to get pregnant.

**MYTH:** Only alcoholic mothers have babies with FAS.

**TRUTH:** Even light to medium amounts of drinking can increase the risk of defects or even the death of the fetus. Light to moderate drinking in the first trimester is linked to a 30% increase in miscarriage in the first trimester and to an 70% increase in early second trimester miscarriage.

**MYTH:** I don't feel pregnant. I don't look pregnant. The baby is too small to be affected by alcohol.

**TRUTH:** Actually, some of the most serious damage can happen in the first eight weeks of pregnancy, when you may not even know you are pregnant. By five weeks pregnant alcohol can enter the placenta and a fetus will have the same blood alcohol level as the mother.

**MYTH:** I heard one glass of wine or beer is fine after the first trimester.

**TRUTH:** No amount of alcohol is truly safe during pregnancy. While doctors can weigh on both sides of the line, most do agree that any amount of alcohol consumed daily is too much. Others agree that half a glass is "probably" ok further into your pregnancy, when drunk with a meal. "Probably" is not a guarantee for the safety of an unborn child. Both the Center for Disease Control and the U.S. Surgeon General advise that pregnant women completely abstain from alcohol.

## A Standard Drink =



12 oz. Wine Cooler



12 oz. Beer



5 oz. Wine



1.25 oz. Liquor

## No Safe Time, No Safe Amount

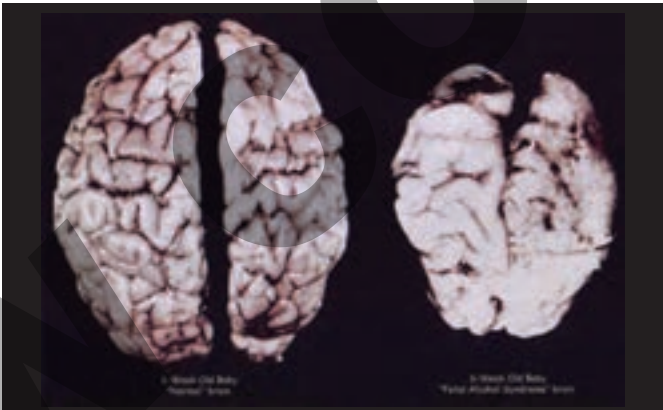
All drinks containing alcohol can hurt a fetus. No amount of alcohol is known to be safe to drink if you are pregnant. Drinking alcohol can hurt the developing brain or cause mental and behavioral defects at any time in the pregnancy. Alcohol also limits the fetus's growth.

## FAS is a series of birth defects that lasts a lifetime.

### Here are some common effects of FAS:

- Slower growth of fetus and/or smaller size at birth
- Smaller size in childhood and adulthood
- Small head, small eyes, cleft palate, short nose, flattened forehead, smooth area between the nose and lips and thinned upper lip
- Intellectual, learning, and developmental disabilities
- Serious behavioral problems, attention deficits
- Speech and hearing problems
- Heart and kidney defects

When a child has a few of these problems but the case is more mild, it is called Fetal Alcohol Effects (FAE). The effects of FAE are also life-lasting.



## Facts About FAS

### Heavy Drinkers (2 or more drinks a day):

- 30-45% of alcoholic women have children with severe FAS.
- Up to 3 times more likely to have a miscarriage than nondrinkers.

### Moderate Drinkers (7-10 drinks a week) and Light Drinkers (1-3 drinks a week):

- Children whose mothers drink moderately during pregnancy may be small for their age and have learning and behavioral problems.
- The risk of miscarriage is double the normal rate in women who have 2 to 4 drinks per week.
- Light and moderate drinkers may have babies with lowered attention spans (attention deficit disorder), slow reaction times, and lower IQ scores.
- Two drinks per week is associated with low birth weight.

## When to Get Help

If you are pregnant and can not stop drinking ask your doctor for professional help. Addressing your problem early will help the health of your child.

Early diagnosis can help minimize the long-term problems for a child who has been exposed to alcohol. Be honest with your doctor about the amount of alcohol you consumed during pregnancy. Don't wait for problems to start before asking for help.



## Physical Effects of FAS



## It's Never Too Late.

Pregnancy is a perfect time to make healthy changes for both you and your baby. Quitting drinking is a great way to give your baby a healthy start in life. If you stop drinking now, you have a better chance of having a healthy baby.

**Make Healthy Choices Now To Protect Your Child!**