

When it Comes to Alcohol Zero Matters

If a pregnant woman drinks alcohol, it will reach her unborn baby. A woman's use of alcohol while pregnant may affect the developing baby and cause a range of mental and physical difficulties.

During pregnancy there is:

No safe time to drink alcohol. Most organ growth is completed a few weeks after the first three months. Brain growth continues during pregnancy and after birth. Exposure to alcohol anytime during pregnancy can affect the baby's brain.

No safe type of alcohol. All types of alcohol may be harmful to the growing baby.

No safe amount. A safe amount of alcohol in pregnancy is not known. It is never too late to stop drinking. Binge drinking and heavy drinking are very harmful to an unborn baby. If you are concerned about the amount of alcohol you drank before knowing you were pregnant, talk with your health-care provider or call Motherisk (1-877-FAS-INFO). The call is confidential.

If a woman is having trouble not drinking alcohol, help is available. Your local public health unit will have information on supports.

If a woman is pregnant or planning to be, the safest choice is to not drink any alcohol. The best time to stop drinking is before a woman gets pregnant.

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)

FASD is a term to describe the full range of harm that can result from drinking alcohol during pregnancy.

FASD is preventable. There is no cure for FASD; it lasts a lifetime. There are supports for parents and children affected by FASD.

Signs of FASD may include:

- Learning difficulties
- Vision or hearing problems
- Poor memory
- Behaviour problems
- Slow physical growth
- Heart, kidney or bone problems

The amount of alcohol it takes to harm a baby is unknown. Alcohol reaches the unborn baby through the mother's bloodstream. The harms that may result depend on the amount, pattern and timing of consumption as well as the woman's overall health.

Q: Does drinking by the biological father affect his unborn baby?

A: If a biological father drinks alcohol, it will not have an effect at the time of conception and does not affect the unborn child yet; he should try to be as healthy as possible before conception. A father or partner can support a woman's choice not to drink when pregnant or when trying to get pregnant by not drinking.

Q: I'm not pregnant but my drinking worries me.

A: Talk to your health-care provider or go online to assess your drinking, www.checkyourdrinking.net

Q: I'm worried I can't stop drinking on my own.

A: You are not alone. Support is available. Contact your health-care provider or dial 311 or 905-825-6000 to speak to a public health nurse.