Alcohol and pregnancy

Pregnant women are strongly urged not to drink alcohol during pregnancy.

Drinking alcohol while pregnant has been shown to cause harm to a baby as it develops in the womb. Alcohol used during pregnancy may also lead to long-term medical problems and birth defects.

Information

When a pregnant woman drinks alcohol, the alcohol travels through her blood and into the baby's blood, tissues, and organs. Alcohol breaks down much more slowly in the baby's body than in an adult. That means the baby's blood alcohol level remains increased longer than the mother's. This can harm the baby and can sometimes lead to lifelong damage.

DANGERS OF ALCOHOL DURING PREGNANCY

Drinking a lot of alcohol during pregnancy can lead to a group of defects in the baby known as fetal alcohol syndrome. Symptoms can include:

- Behavior and attention problems
- Heart defects
- Changes in the shape of the face
- Poor growth before and after birth
- Poor muscle tone and problems with movement and balance
- Problems with thinking and speech
- Learning problems

These medical problems are lifelong and can range from mild to severe.
Complications seen in the infant may include:

- Cerebral palsy
- Premature delivery
- Miscarriage or stillbirth

HOW MUCH ALCOHOL IS SAFE?

There is no known "safe" amount of alcohol use during pregnancy. Alcohol use appears to be the most harmful during the first 3 months of pregnancy; however, drinking alcohol anytime during pregnancy can be harmful.

Alcohol includes beer, wine, wine coolers, and liquor.

One drink is defined as:

- 12 oz of beer
- 5 oz of wine
- 1.5 oz of liquor

How much you drink is just as important as how often you drink.

- Even if you don't drink often, drinking a large amount at one time can harm the baby.
- Binge drinking (5 or more drinks on one sitting) greatly increases a baby’s risk of alcohol-related damage.
- Drinking moderate amounts of alcohol when pregnant may lead to miscarriage.
- Heavy drinkers (those who drink more than 2 alcoholic beverages a day) are at greater risk of giving birth to a child with fetal alcohol syndrome.
- The more you drink, the more you raise your baby's risk for harm.

DO NOT DRINK DURING PREGNANCY

Women who are pregnant or who are trying to get pregnant should avoid drinking any amount of alcohol. The only way to prevent fetal alcohol syndrome is to not drink alcohol during pregnancy.

If you did not know you were pregnant and drank alcohol, stop drinking as soon as you find out. The sooner you stop drinking alcohol, the healthier your baby will be.
Choose non-alcoholic versions of beverages you like.

If you cannot control your drinking, avoid being around other people who are using alcohol.

Pregnant women with alcoholism should join an alcohol abuse rehabilitation program. They should also be followed closely by a health care provider.

The following organizations may be of help:

- National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependency -- www.ncadd.org
- Substance Abuse Treatment Facility Locator -- 1-800-662-4357
  (findtreatment.samhsa.gov/TreatmentLocator/)

Alternative Names

Drinking alcohol during pregnancy

References


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