

Alcohol Use in Pregnancy

Women who are pregnant or who may be pregnant should not drink alcohol. This includes women who are trying to get pregnant and women who are at risk of becoming pregnant because they do not use effective contraception (birth control).

Alcohol use during pregnancy is dangerous

Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can cause lifelong physical, behavioral, and intellectual disabilities.

Alcohol in the mother's blood passes to the baby through the umbilical cord. Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can cause miscarriage, stillbirth, and a range of lifelong physical, behavioral, and intellectual disabilities. These disabilities are known as fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASDs).

Fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) is the most involved condition among the range of FASDs. A baby born with FAS has a small head, weighs less than other babies, and has distinctive facial features.

Some of the behavioral and intellectual disabilities of people with FASDs include:

- Difficulty with learning or memory
- Higher than normal level of activity (hyperactivity)
- Difficulty with attention
- Speech and language delays
- Low IQ
- Poor reasoning and judgment skills

People born with FASDs can also have problems with their organs, including the heart and kidneys.

Any amount of alcohol during pregnancy is harmful

There is no known safe amount of alcohol use during pregnancy or when trying to get pregnant.

All types of alcohol are dangerous during pregnancy

Drinking any type of alcohol can affect the baby's growth and development and cause FASDs. This includes all types of wine, beer, and mixed drinks.

A 5-ounce glass of red or white wine (12% alcohol) has the same amount of alcohol as a 12-ounce can of beer (5% alcohol) or a 1.5 ounce shot of hard liquor (40% alcohol).



FASDs are completely preventable if a woman does not drink alcohol during pregnancy.

Why take the risk?



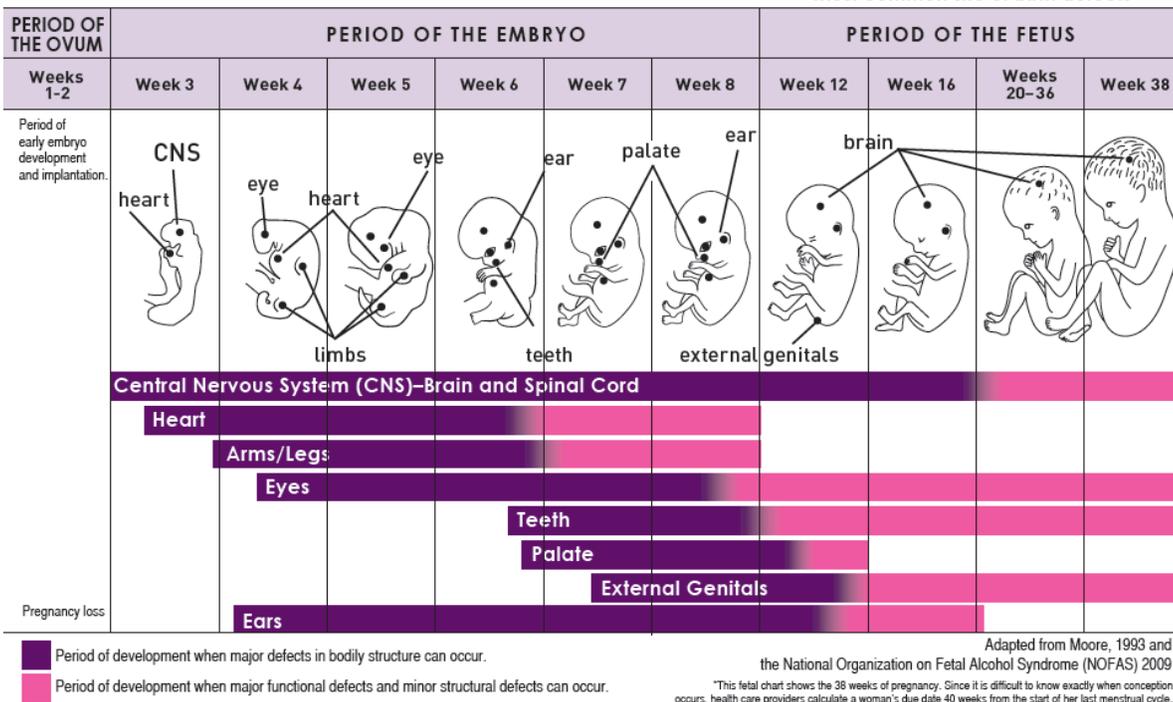
There is no safe time for alcohol use during pregnancy

Alcohol can cause problems for a developing baby throughout pregnancy, including before a woman knows she is pregnant.

The chart below shows important times during pregnancy when birth defects can happen.

FETAL DEVELOPMENT CHART

This chart shows vulnerability of the fetus to defects throughout 38 weeks of pregnancy.*
 • = Most common site of birth defects



Alcohol use while trying to get pregnant is risky

If a woman is trying to get pregnant, she might already be pregnant. A woman could get pregnant and not know it for up to 4 to 6 weeks. This means she might be drinking and exposing her developing baby to alcohol. The best advice is for women to stop drinking alcohol when they start trying to get pregnant.

Even if a woman is not trying to get pregnant...

A woman should not drink alcohol if she is sexually active and does not use effective contraception (birth control). This is because a woman might get pregnant and expose her baby to alcohol before she knows she is pregnant. Nearly half of all pregnancies in the United States are unplanned. Most women who get pregnant will not know they are pregnant for up to 4 to 6 weeks.

For More Information

The organizations and resources below can provide more information on alcohol use during pregnancy and FASDs:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention www.cdc.gov/fasd or call 800-CDC-INFO
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) FASD Center for Excellence www.fasdcenter.samhsa.gov
- National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism www.niaaa.nih.gov

If you are pregnant or trying to get pregnant and cannot stop drinking, the following organizations and resources can help:

- National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (NOFAS) www.nofas.org or call 800-66-NOFAS (66327)
- Substance Abuse Treatment Facility Locator www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov or call 800-622-HELP (4357)
- Alcoholics Anonymous www.aa.org
- National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependencies, Inc. (NCAAD) www.ncadd.org/get-help