

Avoid alcohol during pregnancy



When pregnant, any amount of alcohol should be avoided as it could cause Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), a condition that can have a detrimental effect on your unborn child.

Many experts recommend that no alcohol should be taken while you are pregnant or when trying to conceive, as many women don't realise they're pregnant in the first few weeks and continue to drink. According to a study that was published in the journal *Studies in Family Planning*, 40% of pregnancies worldwide are unintended.

If alcohol is consumed during pregnancy, unknowingly or not, studies have found that the normal cell development of the foetus's brain and other organs may be hindered, which may result in stillbirth, miscarriage, or mental and physical defects in the baby, known as Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS).

Why you shouldn't risk it

The exact amount of alcohol needed for FAS to develop is not clear. Therefore, any amount of alcohol should be avoided as it could have a detrimental effect on your unborn child. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, all types of alcohol are equally harmful, including all wines and beer.

While FAS occurs most often in women who drink moderate to large amounts of alcohol during pregnancy, its characteristics can also be seen in babies whose mothers report that they drank very little. Until further research is done, and the exact amount of alcohol that affects the developing foetus is determined, doctors are

increasingly recommending that pregnant women abstain from alcohol completely to avoid any risks to their unborn children.

FAS is characterised by:

- Low birth weight and slow physical development.
- Mental impairment, behavioural problems, short attention span, and learning difficulties.
- Abnormal facial features, including a small head, small eye openings, a smooth ridge between the nose and upper lip, and flattened face.
- Deformed spine, ribs, and sternum.
- Finger and toe deformities, including bent, webbed, or missing digits.
- Vision or hearing problems.
- Heart, kidney, or bone problems.

Can't stop? Get help!

It's never too late to stop drinking alcohol during pregnancy. The sooner you stop drinking alcohol, the better for your baby and yourself, as your baby is developing throughout the pregnancy, and can be affected by alcohol at any time.

If you can't stop, it's important to get help as soon as possible from your healthcare provider, your employee wellbeing programme, or Alcoholics Anonymous.