

People with FAS or “partial FAS” often have:

- difficulty in school and social situations
- mental health concerns
- problems living on their own or working at a job
- their own alcohol or drug challenges

Remember...

Effects of drug and alcohol use are different for every pregnancy and every baby, depending on:

- amount used
- if other drugs are used, and which ones
- when in the pregnancy the drugs are used
- mother’s general health
- other risks in the baby’s environment

It helps you and your baby if you cut back or stop using alcohol at any point in your pregnancy.

Adapted with permission from Vancouver Island Health Authority, South Island Prevention Services

Revised by:

Fir Square Family Education - February 2003

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For more information about the effects of alcohol use during pregnancy, call:

- your doctor
- a public health nurse
- an alcohol and drug counsellor
- Motherrisk infoline (confidential counselling)
Toll Free 1-877-327-4636

Sheway

369 Hawks Avenue, Vancouver, B.C.

Phone: 604-658-1200

A/D Information Line

Phone: 604-660-9382

1-800-663-1441

Detox Access Line

Phone: 604-658-1250

Pender Clinic

59 W. Pender

Phone: 604-669-9181

3-Bridges Community Health Centre

1292 Hornby Street, Vancouver

Phone: 604-736-9844

Community Aboriginal Health Advocate:

Phone: 604-873-1833

Mental Health Liaison Worker

Phone: 604-872-6723

Alcohol Use During Pregnancy

Effects on Mother and Baby



How does alcohol work?

Alcohol, the most popular drug in Canada, is called a drug because it slows down the central nervous system.

Alcohol rapidly enters the bloodstream. It may have dangerous effects on all organs of the body.

Alcohol goes through the placenta to the developing baby. When you drink, your baby's blood alcohol is the same as yours. There is NO known safe level of drinking during pregnancy so experts recommend No alcohol during this time.

What are the effects of alcohol for the pregnant woman?

Effects of alcohol include:

- loss of appetite, resulting in a slow weight gain
- anemia (low red blood cells) and tiredness
- increased risk of miscarriage in the first three months
- rapid (really fast) labour (hard for the baby)
- low blood sugars
- premature (early labour)

If you suddenly stop drinking, it can cause withdrawal symptoms for you and your baby. If you want to quit, tell your doctor so that you and your baby can be kept safe.

What are the effects of prenatal alcohol exposure on the baby?

If you drink a lot of alcohol while pregnant (either bingeing or drinking regularly), you increase your risk of having a baby with lasting birth defects.

Alcohol can harm the baby at any time during the pregnancy.

In the first three months you are pregnant, alcohol can cause physical problems in the baby. In the last few months, it can slow down the baby's growth. The baby's brain, which develops all through the pregnancy, can be damaged at any time.

Right after birth, babies exposed to alcohol in the womb can have signs of withdrawal. Babies may:

- be jittery (shaky)
- cry more than usual
- have problems feeding
- have problems sleeping
- have "floppy" muscle tone
- be sensitive to noise or touch

Some babies need medication to help them with their withdrawal.

What about breastfeeding?

Alcohol goes into breastmilk. Heavy drinking can lower the amount of milk you make. To keep your baby safe while you are breastfeeding:

- don't drink alcohol or drink small amounts occasionally
- breastfeed before having a drink so there will be less alcohol in your breastmilk the next time you breastfeed
- have safe "alcohol-free" breastmilk stored for your baby if you plan to drink large amounts of alcohol

What are the outcomes for children?

When you drink during pregnancy, your baby is at risk of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS). This is especially true with heavy drinking. People with FAS:

- smaller all their lives
- have central nervous system damage resulting in learning problems, short attention span, hyperactivity, poor muscle tone and coordination
- have facial abnormalities (i.e., small eye openings, drooping eyelids, flat wide nose bridge, thin upper lip, flattened area between nose and lip)

Those with just a few of those characteristics have "partial FAS", and may have other problems such as heart defects or skeleton/other body organ problems.