

Alcohol

Drug Information;

Alcohol is a depressant. It slows down the activity in the brain and can effect concentration and coordination and the response time to unexpected situations. In small doses, alcohol makes you feel relaxed and lower inhibitions. You feel more confident. In large prolonged doses, it can cause unconsciousness and even death.

Effects on Pregnancy;

- Like many drugs, alcohol crosses the placenta. Alcohol can cause problems such as miscarriage, premature birth, stillbirth and small babies due to slow growth in pregnancy.
- There are no known safe levels of alcohol consumption in pregnancy. Whilst drinking less than two drinks per day has not been shown to cause any obvious harm to the fetus, it is not known whether there is a true safe level of alcohol consumption during pregnancy. Consequently there is no time in pregnancy when drinking alcohol could be considered safe.
- It is known that drinking larger quantities at any one time may affect the developing fetal brain. The risk to the baby appears to be highest in the earlier states of pregnancy. Reducing or ceasing alcohol at any state of the pregnancy benefits the woman and babies health.
- **FAS:** Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) is a rare condition caused by heavy alcohol consumption during pregnancy. Alcohol can restrict the baby's growth and affect brain growth and development resulting in major delay, behavioural and learning problems in childhood. Babies with this condition also have abnormal facial features and are smaller than average.

Counselling;

Pregnancy is a good motivator to reduce or cease alcohol use. Counselling can provide a woman with strategies of how to drink less and/or stop alcohol consumption during her pregnancy. Counselling may assist woman to explore personal issues and identify stresses and triggers for alcohol consumption.

When a woman is trying to become pregnant it is recommended that she limit her alcohol consumption to one standard drink once a week. A standard drink is 100ml wine, 30ml nip of spirits, 285ml of full strength beer. 375 of low alcohol beer, 60ml sherry or port.

If already pregnant it is recommended the, any reduction in drinking is important, especially if you continue to reduce as the pregnancy progresses.

Counselling can provide you with strategies about how to drink less and/or stop your alcohol consumption during pregnancy so you are able to learn new ways to manage stress, explore personal issues and make positive changes.

Pregnancy Care;

For women with an ongoing drinking problem, it is recommended that she reduce the effects of alcohol by:

- You may need a Vitamin B supplement - your midwife or doctor will advise you.
- Avoid dehydration by drinking plenty of water.
- You may need dietary supplements such as iron and calcium throughout your pregnancy. All women should take folate before conceiving and for at least the first three months of their pregnancy.
- Regular pregnancy care is important to ensure that you are healthy and that your baby is growing well.
- Seek advice from your doctor or a drug and alcohol service to assist you withdraw from alcohol safely. If you drink heavily on a regular basis, medication prescribed by your doctor may be required to ensure you have a safe withdrawal.
- Nausea, vomiting and constipation commonly occur in pregnancy. Speak with your midwife or doctor - they may refer you to a dietician.
- Eating well during pregnancy and whilst you are breastfeeding is important for the health of you and your baby.

Breastfeeding;

While the effects of drinking alcohol on breastfeeding are unclear, it is known that alcohol freely passes into breast milk. During the first years of a baby's life, the brain is still developing at a very rapid rate. It is possible that heavy drinking can affect a baby's brain development. Alcohol can also disturb a baby's sleep pattern and reduce the mother's milk supply.

Infant Development;

With the exception of alcohol, it is very difficult to prove that drug use in pregnancy results in any permanent long term behavioural or learning problems in children as they grow up.

Most research suggests that if a child is raised in a caring and supportive family environment, they will do as well at school as any other child in similar circumstances. However, alcohol consumption during pregnancy is a very different problem. Evidence suggests that regular daily consumption of more than one standard drink per day during pregnancy may result in obvious behavioural and learning problems in children that can persist into adult life. The more alcohol that is consumed during pregnancy, the more likely it is that the child will experience significant long term learning and behavioural problems.

The combined use of alcohol and drugs, particularly cannabis and cocaine, is an especially high risk situation.

Care of Infant;

Following birth, the baby will be seen by a paediatric doctor to ensure he/she is well. The baby may need to stay in hospital a little longer than usual to ensure he/she is settled, feeding well and gaining weight.

Drinking alcohol and co-sleeping with a baby is not recommended, as alcohol and/or drugs can make a woman sleep more deeply. The woman may be less aware of where the baby is in her bed and less responsive to her baby's needs. Please refer to SIDS information below.

It is important that a baby is at all times in a smoke free environment.

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome;

SIDS is the sudden unexpected death of a baby from no known cause. It is the most common cause of death for infants in Australia between the ages of one and twelve months. The risk of SIDS is greater if you smoke or use drugs and alcohol during pregnancy or after your baby is born.

For more information, speak with your midwife or doctor or contact SIDS and Kids by phoning, for the cost of a local call, 1300 308 307 or visit the SIDS and Kids, website [www.sids and kids.wa](http://www.sidsandkids.wa)