

How partners, friends and family can help

Everyone has a role in supporting a healthy pregnancy. If someone in your life is pregnant or trying to get pregnant:

Do:

- ▶ find ways to spend time together away from alcohol
- ▶ focus on healthy activities
- ▶ have drinks without alcohol available if hosting parties or events.

Don't:

- ▶ put pressure on anyone to drink
- ▶ Draw attention to others that someone is not drinking.

Social and cultural influences

In Ireland, alcohol can be a big part of social life, and it's common for people to share advice based on what they've heard. This can make it confusing, especially if the messages you hear are mixed.

Some people say that "a small drink won't hurt", but there's no proven safe level of alcohol in pregnancy. It is safest not to drink alcohol at all.

Find out more

It's normal to have questions about alcohol and other lifestyle changes during your pregnancy.

- ▶ mychild.ie/pregnancyalcohol: more information about alcohol and pregnancy
- ▶ mychild.ie: expert advice as you adjust to pregnancy and get ready for your baby
- ▶ hse.ie/alcohol: for more information on alcohol and support services
- ▶ drugs.ie: information on other drugs and how they may affect pregnancy.

Support information

If you are finding it difficult to stop drinking, please contact:

- ▶ your GP, midwife or obstetrician for information and support
- ▶ the confidential HSE Drug and Alcohol Helpline for local help and support.

Freephone: 1800 459 459,
Monday to Friday from 9.30am to 5.30pm.

Email: helpline@hse.ie anytime.



mychild.ie

Pregnancy and alcohol



In all the noise,
the truth is clear.



Pregnancy is a time when many women want to know what they can do to keep themselves and their baby healthy. One of the best things you can do is to not drink alcohol while you are pregnant, and while you are trying to become pregnant.

Why should I have an alcohol-free pregnancy?

It is one of the best things you can do for you and your baby's health. Not drinking alcohol can:

- ▶ make it easier to get pregnant
- ▶ help you feel good and have a healthy pregnancy
- ▶ protect your baby's health as they grow and throughout their life.

How alcohol affects your baby

Alcohol passes from your blood to your baby through the placenta. Your baby's body is still developing. Alcohol can cause problems with the development of all your baby's organs, especially the brain. Drinking alcohol during pregnancy also increases your risk of miscarriage, premature birth and low birth weight.

Drinking any amount of alcohol, at any stage of pregnancy, can affect your baby's growth and health. It is safest to avoid alcohol entirely during pregnancy.

What is FASD?

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) are a group of lifelong, preventable physical and neurodevelopmental conditions.

Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can cause FASD. This can lead to lifelong challenges for your baby, including:

- ▶ trouble learning or paying attention
- ▶ behavioural issues
- ▶ problems with eating and sleeping
- ▶ growth delays
- ▶ emotional and mental health problems
- ▶ physical health problems.

In a smaller number of cases (Fetal Alcohol Syndrome):

- ▶ facial differences
- ▶ organ damage.

Can FASD be cured?

There is no cure for FASD. FASD can cause problems throughout your child's life, but early diagnosis and support can help children do better.

What should I do if I've had alcohol since I became pregnant?

Many people drink alcohol before they know they're pregnant. If this happens, stop drinking as soon as you find out. If you're worried, your GP or midwife will be happy to talk to you. The less your baby is exposed to alcohol over the course of the pregnancy, the greater their chance for healthy brain growth and development. Try not to worry. The main thing is that you've stopped now.

What if I find it hard to stop?

If you drink often or if you find it hard to stop, ask for support and help. It may be helpful to talk to your GP, midwife or obstetrician.

You can also call the HSE Alcohol and Drugs Helpline on **1800 459 459** and speak in confidence with a qualified professional. These professionals will be happy to help and support you.

Will the occasional drink do any harm?

There's no proven safe level of alcohol in pregnancy. It is safest not to drink alcohol at all.

Trying to get pregnant?

If you are planning to become pregnant stop drinking alcohol. This protects your baby from the start.

When trying to get pregnant, both partners avoiding alcohol can improve health and make it easier to get pregnant.

Tips for an alcohol-free pregnancy

- ▶ Plan ahead and try to avoid people and places that make you want to drink.
- ▶ If it feels right for you, tell people close to you why you're not drinking.
- ▶ Plan activities that do not involve alcohol.
- ▶ Check the labels on alcohol-free or low alcohol drinks as they can contain alcohol. It's safest not to drink these while you are pregnant.