

ALCOHOL AND PREGNANCY **DON'T MIX**

If you're pregnant, or trying to become pregnant, and wondering if it's okay to indulge in the occasional small glass of wine or to enjoy a little champagne on New Year's Eve, the information and advice you receive may be confusing. The science can be complicated! Here's what the most up-to-date science tells us about the effects of drinking alcohol during pregnancy:

- 1** It is **safest not to drink alcohol** when pregnant. Although the science cannot tell us an exact safe or unsafe amount of alcohol during pregnancy, we do know that **alcohol impacts fetal brain development**.
- 2** Although the research is not conclusive, studies show that **even small amounts of alcohol** can affect the fetus.
- 3** There is **no safe time to consume alcohol**, because fetal brain development occurs throughout pregnancy.
- 4** The fetus cannot metabolize alcohol very well and it concentrates in the amniotic fluid, so **it is exposed to a higher concentration of alcohol** for a longer time than the mother. The fetus also drinks amniotic fluid!
- 5** The specific **effects of alcohol on the fetus can vary**, even among those with similar levels of exposure – no two mother-fetus pairs are the same.
- 6** Drinking alcohol during pregnancy may also **change the mother's DNA and genes** which, when passed onto the developing fetus (and future grandchildren), may **increase their risk of health issues later in life**.
- 7** Exposure to alcohol during pregnancy can lead to **life-long consequences**, including physical health problems, behavioural difficulties and learning disabilities, described as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).
- 8** **Individuals with FASD are more at risk** for substance use, mental health issues, having trouble in school and with the law. Individuals with FASD can be successful with support, but often find **everyday tasks difficult**.
- 9** As well as risk of FASD, drinking alcohol during pregnancy increases the **risk of miscarriage, stillbirth, premature birth and low birth weight**.
- 10** If you are having unprotected sex and you are drinking, **take regular pregnancy tests**. If you find out you are pregnant, it is best to stop drinking alcohol and seek prenatal care. Choose a mocktail or a non-alcoholic drink if you are trying to conceive; alcohol **can affect fertility**.
- 11** Risks from drinking alcohol in pregnancy **apply to all women**, no matter your income, ethnicity, age or location.

*If you have any questions about alcohol and pregnancy, or about FASD, please talk to your health care provider.
For more information about substance use during pregnancy, visit PregnancyInfo.ca*

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