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Alcohol & Pregnancy

A Pocket Guide



Time IVA Change
Border Region Alcohol Project



Health and
Social Care



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive



cooperation and working together
for health gain and social well being in border areas



Think before
you drink

Alcohol & Pregnancy

This guide is for you if you think you might be pregnant now or hope to be in the future.

It is aimed at answering some of the questions you may have about alcohol and pregnancy. It will guide you to make healthier choices.

Can I drink alcohol when I'm pregnant?

The safest approach in pregnancy is to choose not to drink at all.

It is important to be aware that when you drink alcohol, your baby also drinks.

Your baby's brain and nervous system grow throughout the pregnancy.

Harm can happen even when small amounts of alcohol are consumed. This harm may not become evident until childhood.

The risk of damage to your baby's physical, neurological and mental development increases the more you drink and binge drinking is especially harmful. This risk relates to a range of conditions which are known as Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD).

Further information on Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders is available at www.fasd.ie and www.nofas-uk.org

What if I have been drinking alcohol before I knew I was pregnant?

Please be reassured that if you drank small amounts of alcohol around the time of conception there is very little risk of harm to the baby in your womb. A single episode of 'binge drinking'* at that stage is less likely to be harmful to the baby.

It is important, however, to be aware that drinking, whether in small amounts, heavily or 'binge drinking'* in early pregnancy can be harmful to the developing baby and there is an increased risk of early miscarriage.

Some women may be unaware of their pregnancy for several weeks or months. If there is any chance you may be pregnant, avoid drinking alcohol until you are sure you are not pregnant.

Pregnant mums should always consult with their health professional if they have any concerns about their alcohol intake.

*Binge drinking definition: **Republic of Ireland:** 5 standard drinks for women (1 standard drink in the Republic of Ireland = 10 grams of alcohol).
UK = 6 units of alcohol (1 unit of alcohol in the UK = 8 grams of alcohol).

How does alcohol affect the unborn baby?

Alcohol is a toxic substance. Alcohol passes from the mum's bloodstream through the placenta and into the baby's bloodstream. The placenta is not a filter. The unborn baby does not have a developed liver to process any alcohol.

Drinking alcohol in pregnancy can affect:

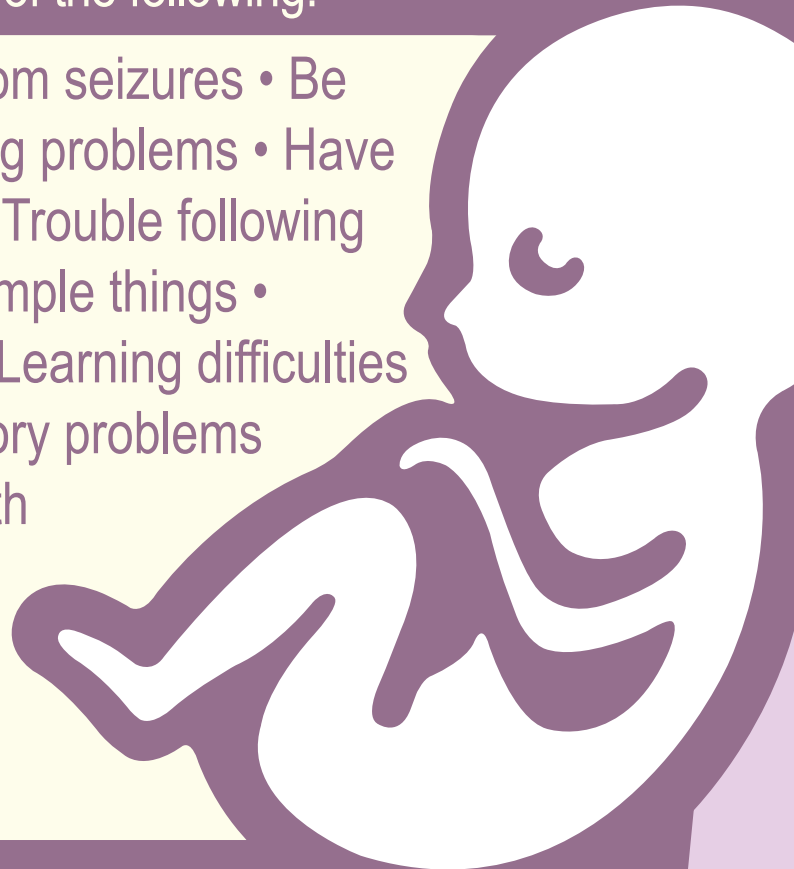
- the baby's growth and development in the womb and during his or her entire lifetime;
- the baby's/child's long term physical and mental health; and
 - the child's ability to learn and retain information (learning difficulties).


What does having an FASD mean?

Having an **Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)** condition means that the alcohol related neurological damage, which can range from mild to severe, can cause the baby/developing child to have any or all of the following:

- Be born premature
- Suffer from seizures
- Be born small
- Eating and sleeping problems
- Have problems seeing and hearing
- Trouble following directions and learning to do simple things
- Trouble with paying attention
- Learning difficulties in school
- Have working memory problems
- Have trouble getting along with others and controlling own behaviour
- May need medical care all their lives
- May need special educational support

Remember FASDs can be 100% preventable by **NOT** drinking alcohol during your pregnancy.



A stylized illustration of a woman's profile in shades of purple and pink, with a large baby bump. The woman's eyes are closed, and her hair is styled in a bun. The background is a light pink color.

Tips to take care of you and your baby during your pregnancy.

Making healthier choices now (or at any time during your pregnancy) will have a positive impact on the physical health and emotional wellbeing of you and your baby

Choose non alcoholic alternatives e.g. alcohol free drinks

Manage your stress, exercise and eat healthily

Build a good network of support for you and your family

Talk to your midwife or health professional about any concerns you may have

Allow time to prepare for parenting

Maintain a healthy social life and keep up your hobbies and interests

Explore ways to develop a healthier lifestyle

If you are concerned about your drinking or any aspects of your pregnancy it is important that you speak to any of the following health professionals:

- **GP or Family Doctor •**
 - **Midwife •**
 - **Health Visitor •**
- **Public Health Nurse •**
 - **Obstetrician •**

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