

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

Why pregnancy and alcohol don't mix

Is drinking alcohol during pregnancy dangerous?

Yes. Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can be dangerous to you and your baby. Babies born to mothers who drink alcohol during pregnancy may have health problems. One of these problems is *fetal alcohol syndrome*.

What is fetal alcohol syndrome?

Fetal alcohol syndrome is a group of problems in children born to mothers who drank alcohol during their pregnancy. These babies are usually small and underweight. They often have birth defects and, as they grow older, they may have behavior problems. The most serious problem is mental retardation.

How common is fetal alcohol syndrome?

In the United States, about 1,200 children are born each year with fetal alcohol syndrome. It is the leading cause of mental retardation in this country.

How can I prevent fetal alcohol syndrome?

The best thing you can do is stop drinking when you are thinking about getting pregnant. If you get pregnant, quit drinking alcohol and try other beverages, like water or fruit juices.

Will it hurt my baby even if I don't drink every day?

Yes. Even small amounts of alcohol can be harmful. Because no amount of alcohol can be considered safe, pregnant women should avoid all alcohol during the entire pregnancy. (Drinks with alcohol in them include beer, wine, hard liquor and wine coolers.)

“Binge drinking”—having five or more drinks at a time—is particularly dangerous for your baby, because it quickly makes the level of alcohol in your blood very high. So, even if you don't drink every day, you may put your baby at risk for fetal alcohol syndrome.

What if I can't stop drinking?

Be honest with your doctor. Tell him or her how much you are drinking. Your doctor may be able to help you stop drinking before it hurts your baby.

Is there a cure for fetal alcohol syndrome?

No, there is no cure. Children with fetal alcohol syndrome can be helped, though. The treatment involves giving them good medical and dental care, and eyeglasses or hearing aids if these are needed, and placing them in special school programs.

The best way to treat fetal alcohol syndrome is to keep it from happening. You can do this by not drinking alcohol during your pregnancy.

Remember these things

- No amount of alcohol is safe in pregnancy.
- If you usually drink, quit as soon as you think you're pregnant.
- If you can't quit drinking by yourself, get help quickly.

This handout provides a general overview on this topic and may not apply to everyone. To find out if this handout applies to you and to get more information on this subject, talk to your family doctor.



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