

Responsible drinking

Helping people make informed choices about alcohol.



Foetal Alcohol Syndrome

Heavy drinking during pregnancy can cause Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS)

During pregnancy, the foetus receives all the nutrients it needs to grow and develop through the placenta. If a woman drinks alcohol during pregnancy, the alcohol in her blood crosses the placenta to the foetus posing risks to foetal development. The level of possible harm is thought to be related to the amount of alcohol consumed and the frequency and timing of the consumption.

Strong scientific evidence demonstrates that heavy drinking during pregnancy can cause congenital abnormalities including Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS). FAS is characterised by a cluster of anomalies that include central nervous system dysfunction, distinctive facial feature abnormalities, and growth deficiencies both during pregnancy and afterwards.

Some characteristics of FAS include:

- Low birth weight
- Facial abnormalities
- Small head size
- Emotional, social and behavioural problems
- Mental retardation
- Slow growth and poor coordination

While there is conclusive scientific evidence that excessive alcohol consumption can harm the foetus, not all women who abuse alcohol during pregnancy give birth to children with FAS.

Less is known about the effects of light or moderate alcohol consumption on the foetus. Currently there is no conclusive evidence of increased risk of FAS for pregnant women who are light or infrequent-drinkers.

There is no known safe level of alcohol consumption during pregnancy. And while heavy drinking is especially risky in the early stages of pregnancy, it also presents risk during the second and third trimesters.

Pregnant women should either not drink alcohol, or seek medical advice before they do. Indeed, governments and medical bodies around the world advise women to abstain from drinking or to drink only small amounts of alcohol during pregnancy.

In brief

- Excessive drinking during pregnancy can cause FAS
- Heavy drinking is especially risky in early stages of pregnancy, but is risky throughout
- There is no established safe threshold for alcohol consumption during pregnancy
- No conclusive evidence links FAS with light or infrequent alcohol consumption
- Governments and medical bodies recommend women abstain from, or drink very little, alcohol during pregnancy

Take action

Talk to your doctor or health care professional before drinking during pregnancy.

www.aboutalcohol.com

These sites contain further information that you may find useful.

Other websites

- www.alcoholinfo.nl
- www.jellinek.nl
- www.trimbos.nl
- www.drinkaware.co.uk
- www.aa-nederland.nl
- www.tactus.nl

- www.alcoholondercontrole.nl
- www.spreekbeurten.info/alcohol
- www.alcoholenik.nl
- www.stichting-be-aware.nl
- www.verslaving.nl
- www.laatzenietverzuipen.nl