

## **Alcohol and Pregnancy**

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It's summertime! That means barbeques, parties, weddings and longer nights relaxing outdoors. Alcohol is often a companion to those activities. Many of us can have a couple of drinks on the weekend and not suffer the consequences. For some of us though, that can of beer or sweet, flavored malt beverage may have a huge impact on the rest of your life.

Women who are pregnant or planning on getting pregnant should avoid alcohol of any type. Many people know that drinking alcohol during pregnancy can lead to birth defects – but just how much is too much? Most experts agree that any alcohol is bad for developing babies, even just one drink. Remember whatever mom puts into her body is also going into her baby's body. When a fetus is developing, alcohol can have harmful effects on the baby's growing brain. Brain growth happens throughout pregnancy even at its earliest stages. Many women do not know they are pregnant for the first few weeks. Because of this, sexually active women who do not use contraception may want to reconsider drinking any kind of alcohol.

Babies born to moms who drink may have a condition known as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, more commonly known as FASD. FASD is a collection of different disabilities. These may include mental retardation, birth defects, abnormal facial features, slow growth, and problems with the central nervous system. Kids with FASD may have problems with learning, speech, memory, and hearing. Remember that as a parent, you are responsible for your child's wellbeing and care. FASD is a lifelong condition, with no cure, and a child will never outgrow the damage that drinking during pregnancy may cause. Additionally, parents' are profoundly affected throughout their own lives when caring for a disabled child.

What can you do to prevent FASD? Talk with your doctor about your alcohol use as soon as you find you are pregnant. There are many tests a doctor can do to check on your baby's development. If you do not want to get pregnant and/or stop drinking, consider using contraception. If you feel that you cannot stop drinking, consider talking with a professional.

Any drink that has alcohol can harm a baby, even something with a lower volume like beer or wine. Malt drinks, are very popular and often times they contain more alcohol than beer. If a woman does drink during pregnancy, she should stop as soon as possible because it is never too late. Women who do not want to get pregnant should always use contraception every time they have sex. Make this summer a happy and healthy one – especially if a new baby is in the forecast!

For more information and resources speak with your doctor, or visit <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/fas/default.htm>. For a list of available brochures and other materials, you can visit the Family Ties Network, Inc. website

[www.familytiesnetwork.org](http://www.familytiesnetwork.org), and click on the “library” icon. For local resources contact the Prevention Network at 315-471-1359.

*REACH CNY (formerly the Family Ties Network, Inc.,) works to ensure access and support for the full range of quality, culturally-sensitive health and human services; to reduce teen pregnancies; and promote the health and well-being of individuals and families; through education and advocacy.*

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