

View this article online at: patient.info/news-and-features/what-to-do-if-you-miss-alcohol-during-pregnancy

What to do if you miss alcohol during pregnancy

The message given to pregnant women is to not drink any alcohol. However, this can be easier said than done, especially during the festive season. Suddenly, staying sober can seem much harder at Christmas or New Year when you're sober and everyone else is indulging in bubbly. So what can you do if you miss alcohol during pregnancy?

Why it's normal to miss drinking during pregnancy

If you're pregnant, it can be difficult to talk about finding avoiding [alcohol](#) difficult. You may worry about being judged if you own up to missing glasses of wine after work, or feeling frustrated when sticking to apple juice at a wedding.

However, it's normal to find cutting back on alcohol hard – or to feel like you are missing out. Pregnancy involves many [lifestyle changes](#) and while these can be positive, they can still take some adjusting to.

From cutting back on [caffeine](#) and alcohol to quitting [smoking](#), pregnancy can bring big changes to women's lives – and some may find it easier than others to cope with these. It can be even harder when seeing other people [drink](#) too, such as partners and friends.

Pregnancy can also be a difficult time [emotionally](#) and mentally. [Hormonal changes](#) can affect women's mental health and it's common to feel [anxious](#), [low](#) or overwhelmed when expecting. This can make alcohol more tempting, even though drinking can make you feel psychologically worse.

Is it safe to drink alcohol during pregnancy?

Experts are still unsure exactly whether any amount of alcohol is completely safe for women to have while [pregnant](#). Some [studies](#) highlight a lack of evidence to support the claim that even light drinking is bad for fetal development, but ultimately, researchers don't know for certain whether any amount is safe. It is also very difficult for healthcare professionals to regulate how much alcohol [pregnant](#) women are drinking. Therefore, women are advised to avoid alcohol entirely.

"If you are pregnant, think you could become pregnant or are trying to conceive, the safest approach is not to drink alcohol at all, to keep risks to your future baby to a minimum," says Billie Morgan, communications officer at [Drinkaware](#). "Drinking [alcohol](#) at any stage during pregnancy can cause harm to your baby and the more you drink, the greater the risk."

Why is drinking alcohol during pregnancy harmful?

Drinking alcohol during [pregnancy](#) can be harmful because the [alcohol](#) consumed crosses from the mother's bloodstream through the placenta directly into the baby's blood. The baby's liver is one of the last organs to develop and it cannot process alcohol efficiently. As a result, too much exposure to alcohol can affect their development.

Drinking alcohol, especially in the first three months of pregnancy, increases the risk of [miscarriage](#), [premature birth](#) and your baby having a low birth weight.

"How a baby will be affected depends on how much its mother drinks during the pregnancy and the mother's metabolism," says Morgan. "If you didn't know you were pregnant and you drank alcohol during early pregnancy, don't panic. Talk to your GP or midwife about any concerns you may have.

"Just because you may have drunk a little alcohol does not necessarily mean that your unborn baby has come to any harm. However, it's obviously important to stop drinking as soon as you do think you may be pregnant," she adds.

The risks are greater the more alcohol is consumed and the effects include learning difficulties and behavioural problems. Drinking heavily throughout pregnancy can cause a baby to develop a serious condition called [fetal alcohol syndrome](#). The symptoms include poor growth, distinct facial features and learning and behavioural problems.

How to avoid alcohol during pregnancy

If you are pregnant, trying to conceive or simply wanting to take a break from drinking after having a child, there are lots of ways you can avoid [alcohol](#).

Ask your partner to cut back

It can be easier to [avoid alcohol](#) if your partner isn't drinking because you won't feel left out. If you feel uncomfortable asking your other half to cut back on alcohol, try emphasising how it would help you during [pregnancy](#) - and therefore the baby too.

"Ask your partner or a friend to encourage and support you by cutting their drinking as well. Our Drinkaware app can help them stay on track," says Morgan.

Try different social situations

Pregnancy can be an [isolating](#) time, particularly if you're feeling [anxious](#) or low. While it's tempting to stay at home if friends are at the pub, it's still important to spend time with loved ones. Try suggesting different activities, such as going for coffee.

"Think about activities where drinking isn't central to what you do," says Morgan. "For example, if you would usually head to the pub, make a point of suggesting meeting friends at the cinema or at a Christmas market."

Try alcohol-free alternatives

There has been a rise in the number of people cutting back on alcohol and as a result, there are more non-alcoholic drink alternatives than ever before. From [non-alcoholic](#) beer to Prosecco and spirits, these drinks can help stop you feeling left out at a party or at the pub.

Seek professional help

If you're struggling to stop drinking or worried about your habits, it's important to speak to your doctor or midwife. In addition, [Drinkline](#) runs a free, confidential helpline on 0300 123 1110 and the pregnancy and baby loss charity [Tommy's](#) also offers advice and support.

If your drinking habits are linked to your [mental health](#), your doctor may recommend talking therapy or another form of treatment. Healthcare professionals will be able to help you find the right support to cut back on alcohol. They may also be able to advise you on different coping strategies to deal with [stress](#) and anxiety, such as lifestyle changes and [exercise](#).

Disclaimer: This article is for information only and should not be used for the diagnosis or treatment of medical conditions. Egton Medical Information Systems Limited has used all reasonable care in compiling the information but makes no warranty as to its accuracy. Consult a doctor or other healthcare professional for diagnosis and treatment of medical conditions. For details see our [conditions](#).

Last updated by: Lydia Smith 05/11/2021	
Peer reviewed by: Dr Sarah Jarvis MBE, FRCGP 05/11/2021	

View this article online at: patient.info/news-and-features/what-to-do-if-you-miss-alcohol-during-pregnancy

Discuss What to do if you miss alcohol during pregnancy and find more trusted resources at [Patient](#).



To find out more visit www.patientaccess.com or download the app



Follow us

