

# Pregnant? Say no to alcohol



Drinking alcohol is a no-no during pregnancy. Foetal alcohol syndrome (FAS), a condition that results from a mother drinking alcohol when pregnant, can affect the development of your child and have long-term consequences.

FAS is a broad spectrum of abnormal signs and symptoms resulting from a foetus' exposure to alcohol. Children with FAS have a range of physical, neurological, and behavioural issues that affect their development and have life-long consequences.

- Stunted growth before and after the baby is born.
- One or more damaged organs, which may include problems with their eyes and ears.
- Distinct facial features e.g. small eyes, thin upper lip, and short, upturned nose (not all children with these features will have FAS or other fetal alcohol spectrum disorders though).
- Brain damage, which can lead to learning disabilities, relationship problems, and developmental issues, among others.

## Causes

FAS has only one cause and that's alcohol use during pregnancy. The alcohol is toxic for the unborn baby. It may damage any of the unborn baby's organs, but the brain and nervous system are the most vulnerable.

Many women say that they will stop drinking as soon as they fall pregnant. Yet many pregnancies are unplanned and women often confirm their pregnancies very late. This means they may unknowingly expose their babies to alcohol in the first trimester.

Because the first trimester is so important to a baby's

development, some pregnant mothers may choose to only abstain from alcohol during this specific period. However, it's important to remember that alcohol is harmful to the unborn baby during the entire pregnancy.

Factors that may increase your risk when drinking alcohol during pregnancy include:

- **Malnourishment:** Most doctors recommend women taking vitamin supplements during pregnancy, which helps in the development of your baby. Vitamin and mineral deficiencies can contribute to development issues in your baby.
- **Smoking:** Cigarette smoke contains harmful chemicals that your baby is exposed to in the womb. This can lead to development issues and even stillbirth.

## Treatment

FAS cannot be cured, so any damage cannot be reversed and treatment will depend on the child with FAS-specific needs.

## Prevention

When it comes to prevention, the main thing to do is to say no to any alcoholic drinks during pregnancy. If you're sexually active and/or planning to get pregnant, stop drinking alcohol sooner rather than later.

Speak to your doctor for further advice.