



ALCOHOL



Putting baby before booze

Beer and hockey. Wine and food. Friends and liquor. For years, these pair-ups have been part of Canadian culture. Many people have found the key to drinking a safe amount of alcohol. But when people start thinking about having a baby, different ideas may surface.

Alcohol can affect a man's sperm. Men who drink alcohol have a greater chance of having low sperm counts – making it harder for a couple to get pregnant. And no one knows for sure how much alcohol it takes to harm a baby as it forms inside a mom-to-be. But we do know that each time a woman drinks, the alcohol will reach the growing baby. The baby's body and brain can struggle to develop normally. The child could face future problems in their intellectual and physical capabilities and behaviour. These are challenges no parent would want to risk if they had a choice. If you are planning a pregnancy, you need to avoid all alcohol all of the time once you stop using birth control and know there is a chance of pregnancy.

What is your drinking personality?

The facts about alcohol become more sobering when you start talking about pregnancy. For you and your partner, this could be a time to take a close look at old habits. As much as you want a baby, can you really pour your last drink? Ask yourself these questions:

- ❖ What are the reasons I choose to drink?
- ❖ How often is alcohol a part of my life? (daily, monthly or at social events)
- ❖ How would I feel about not drinking at all at the next party I am invited to?

- ❖ Do I associate drinking with smoking, eating, watching TV or other activities?
- ❖ How long would it take me to become alcohol-free?

Am I hooked?

"I like to have a few drinks now and then. I don't really need it. I can give it up any time." Or can you? If you have a drinking problem, often you are the last person to recognize it. Even if you know you have a drinking problem you probably don't talk about it. What is a drinking problem?

Answer yes or no to the following questions:

- ❖ I feel I should cut down on my drinking.
- ❖ People annoy me when they bug me about my drinking.
- ❖ I sometimes feel guilty about my drinking and the behaviour it causes.
- ❖ At times I drink first thing in the morning to steady my nerves or treat a hangover.
- ❖ On days when I have alcohol, I drink more than 2 drinks*.
- ❖ I drink more than 11 drinks* in an average week (women).
- ❖ I drink more than 14 drinks* in an average week (men).

** One drink is 1 bottle of beer, 1 bottle of cooler, 142 milliliters (5 ounces) of liquor or 43 milliliters (5 ounces) of wine*

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, you could have a drinking problem that needs attention *before* you enter into pregnancy.



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Glass action – what you can do

People drink alcohol at different times for different reasons. You have your own. Think about when you drink. What other activities can you do instead, even before pregnancy?

I can....

1. Use alcohol-free mixers at parties such as equal parts juice and ginger ale.
2. Get physical, become active before pregnancy.
3. Read a book on baby names, parenting or other interests.
4. Talk with a friend.

My ideas of other activities I can do instead of drinking alcohol:

So much has been written about alcohol and health. On one hand, studies tell us that small amounts of alcohol may protect our hearts. On the other hand, studies also tell us that more than 2 drinks a day may lead to possible health problems. **What we do know is that pregnancy is not a time for drinking – it is a time for new beginnings. In fact, it is best to stop drinking *before* pregnancy.**

FOR HELP CLOSE TO HOME CONTACT:

Health care provider: _____

Local community mental health services: _____

Alcoholics Anonymous and/or Al-Anon: _____

Local public health unit: Call INFOLine at 1-800-268-1154 / 416-341-5518 _____

Motherisk, Alcohol and Substance Use Helpline: 1-877-327-4636 or www.motherisk.org

Drug and Alcohol Facts Information Line (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health):
1-800-463-6273