

# Alcohol and your pregnancy



By making the choice not to drink any alcohol while pregnant or trying for a baby, you are helping to keep your baby safe and healthy.

## What are the risks to my baby if I drink when I am pregnant?

When we drink alcohol it enters our bloodstream. If you are pregnant, alcohol passes through the placenta into your baby's bloodstream, which may cause permanent life-long damage to your baby. It also increases risk of miscarriage and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD).

FASD is a term that describes the full range of harm to a baby that is caused by drinking alcohol during pregnancy. The baby may have:

- brain damage
- vision and hearing difficulties
- poor formation of bones and limbs
- organ damage
- slow growth

There is no known safe level of alcohol use during pregnancy; therefore it is safest not to drink any alcohol. We do know that binge drinking and heavy drinking are most harmful to your baby.

## I drank alcohol before I knew I was pregnant, what should I do?

If you have been drinking small amounts of alcohol the risk is likely to be low. The best thing you can do for your baby is to stop drinking alcohol for the rest of your pregnancy.

If you have been drinking during pregnancy, especially binge drinking, speak honestly to your midwife or GP for advice and support during and after pregnancy.

For advice and information or if you are finding it difficult to stop drinking, please speak to your midwife or GP. They will help you find the right support for you and your baby.

## Substance misuse

No recreational or street drugs are safe at any time and especially during pregnancy. These can affect your baby, directly or indirectly. For example, cocaine and crack are especially dangerous as they have an immediate effect on the baby's blood supply. The effect of Ecstasy on a baby's brain is not yet known.

If you are addicted to drugs, help is available to support you. Being pregnant may be the extra encouragement you need to cope with giving up. Some maternity units will provide special care or help if you need it. Your midwife, GP or antenatal clinic can put you in touch with specialist help. (See **Helping hands**, page 196).



**No alcohol, no risk**