



Tameside and Glossop  
Integrated Care  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Advice on Pregnancy and Alcohol

## Patient Information Leaflet

January 2019

### **Advice on pregnancy and alcohol**

The Chief Medical Officers' guideline is that if you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy the safest approach is not to drink alcohol at all, to keep risks to your baby to a minimum. Drinking alcohol in pregnancy can lead to long-term harm to the baby, and the more alcohol you drink the greater the risk. The risk of harm to the baby is likely to be low if a woman has been drinking only small amounts of alcohol before she knew she was pregnant or during pregnancy. Women who find out they are pregnant after already drinking alcohol during early pregnancy, should avoid further alcohol, but should be aware that it is unlikely in most cases that their baby has been affected.

### **If you are worried about how much alcohol you have been drinking when pregnant, talk to your doctor or midwife.**

Alcohol can have a wide range of differing impacts. These include a range of lifelong conditions, known under the umbrella term of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD). The level and nature of the conditions under this term relate to the amount of alcohol and the developmental stage of the foetus at the time. Research on the effects on a baby of low levels of alcohol in pregnancy can be complex. The risks are probably low, but we can't be sure that this is completely safe.

Heavy alcohol consumption during pregnancy can cause a baby to develop foetal alcohol syndrome (FAS). FAS is a serious condition, in which children have restricted growth and/or facial abnormalities, and learning and behavioural disorders, which are long lasting and may be lifelong

Drinking lesser amounts of alcohol either regularly during pregnancy or in episodes of heavier drinking (binge drinking), is associated with a group of conditions within FASD that are effectively lesser forms of problems seen with FAS. These conditions include physical, mental and behavioural features including learning disabilities which can have lifelong implications.

### **The risk of such problems is likely to be greater the more alcohol you drink.**

Recent reviews have shown that the risks of low birth weight, preterm birth, and being small for gestational age all may increase in mothers drinking above 1-2 units/day during pregnancy. Women who wished to stay below those levels would need to be particularly careful to avoid under-estimating their actual consumption.

### **The safest option is not to drink alcohol at all during pregnancy.**

### **How to avoid alcohol in pregnancy**

It may not be as difficult as you think to avoid alcohol completely for nine months, as many women go off the taste of alcohol early in pregnancy. Most women do give up alcohol once they know they are pregnant or when they are planning to become pregnant. Women who find out they are pregnant after already having drunk in early pregnancy should avoid further alcohol. However, they should not worry unnecessarily, as the risks of their baby being affected are likely to be low. If you are concerned, talk to your midwife or doctor

If you have any questions you want to ask, you can use this space below to remind you

**My Recovery Tameside** is a free and confidential drug and alcohol service for adults (including offenders), young people, families, carers and affected others in Tameside. They provide early intervention and prevention support, recovery and medical interventions and aftercare. They always welcome new clients, so please get in touch if you are interested in getting help from the service or you would just like to ask some questions. Feel free to bring someone with you on your first visit.

They are based at 111-113 Old Street, Ashton-Under-Lyne, Tameside, OL6 7RL and 15 Thornley Street, Hyde. The young people's service is based in community venues across Tameside. You can call them on 0161 672 9420.

If you have a visual impairment this leaflet can be made available in bigger print or on audiotape. If you require either of these options please contact the Patient Information Centre on 0161 922 5332

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## Document control information

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