Alcohol withdrawal and pregnancy

Withdrawal management should always occur with medical support, because to stop suddenly can be dangerous for women who are pregnant and their developing baby.

Women who have an alcohol-use disorder should be offered access to treatment that is matched to the severity of their dependence.

This could include referral to specialist antenatal care and alcohol and other drug treatment by a multidisciplinary team.

There are specialist clinics across Australia that support women who are pregnant and have an alcohol or other drug dependence.

You can find more information about these services at **everymomentmatters.org.au/support.**

"If you are alcohol dependent, you need a lot of reassurance and non-judgmental support to stop drinking when pregnant. The earlier the support, the better the outcomes for mum and baby."

More information and support

Guidelines for the treatment of alcohol problems

For evidence-based information on supporting people around alcohol, pregnancy and breastfeeding, visit: **alcoholtreatmentguidelines.com.au/chapter-14-pregnant-and-breastfeeding-women**

National Alcohol and Other Drug Hotline

For support and counselling, phone **1800 250 015** or visit **drughelp.gov.au**

Alcohol and Drug Foundation

For information and referral to services, visit **adf.org.au**

NOFASD Australia

For information or support on FASD, phone the NOFASD Helpline on **1800 860 613** or visit **nofasd.org.au**

Learn more about alcohol during pregnancy and breastfeeding at **everymomentmatters.org.au**

This resource is developed by NOFASD Australia and the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE). It is endorsed and funded by the Australian Government.

Learn more about NOFASD at **NOFASD.org.au**

Learn more about FARE at **fare.org.au**

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Alcohol and pregnancy:

A guide for alcohol and other drug workers

The advice from Australia's leading health and medical research group is:

Women who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy should not drink alcohol.[1]

This is because alcohol passes directly to the developing baby at every stage of pregnancy and can damage their brain, body, and organs.

Alcohol use during pregnancy can:

- increase the risk of miscarriage, stillbirth, premature birth, or low birth weight
- lead to a preventable disability known as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

The risk of harm to the developing baby from alcohol exposure increases proportionately with the amount and frequency of alcohol consumed.

Talking about alcohol use and pregnancy

Alcohol is an addictive substance. People can find it difficult to stop drinking, including when pregnant or planning a pregnancy.

Providing frank and stigma-free advice about the risks from alcohol during pregnancy will be an important part of your work. Research shows women want clear and consistent information about alcohol and pregnancy.

[1]Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol, National Health and Medical Research Council.

Approaching the conversation

When approaching a conversation about alcohol and pregnancy, deliver honest and clear advice in a supportive tone, without judgement.

Some women you see might not be aware of the risks of alcohol consumption during pregnancy. It is important to share easy to understand information about the specific risks and how alcohol can affect their health and the health of the developing baby.

Providing suitable resources can be helpful. You can find a range of information resources about alcohol, pregnancy, and breastfeeding at **everymomentmatters.org.au.**

It is important to recognise some women may have a sense of shame or guilt about disclosing they are drinking during pregnancy.

Concerns might include:

- being judged by others
- a lack of support from the people around them
- shame from trying and not yet succeeding to stop
- potential for involvement of child welfare
- not being able to give up without the right support.

We want women to know that it is never too late to stop alcohol use during pregnancy with support. Help is available. It is important to reinforce the benefits of stopping drinking at any stage during pregnancy to minimise further risk to the individual and baby.

What women say

We asked women who were alcohol dependent during pregnancy what support they would have liked to receive. Here is what they had to say:

"Kindness. Compassion. Counselling. I needed someone to say, 'it's ok', I understand, you're not doing this by choice. You are not doing this to harm your baby."

"I was fearful. Fearful of the potential harm which could be caused to my baby but fearful of giving up alcohol. I needed help planning a way forward."

"Someone to talk to me...maybe a doctor, maybe a nurse, maybe another recovered alcoholic, another mother. Somebody who has walked in these shoes."

"Give me something to read. I was unwilling to be honest with someone who might judge me, but I read everything!"

"The harms of alcohol to a developing baby, from the very beginning of a pregnancy are real and lifelong. Do whatever it takes to get sober before you get pregnant."