

Alcohol, Pregnancy and FASD Fast Facts

1. An occasional glass of wine throughout my pregnancy won't put my baby at risk of FASD

FALSE

There is no proven safe amount of alcohol which can be consumed during pregnancy. The National Health and Medical Research Council and World Health Organisation advise women to abstain from drinking alcohol during pregnancy and breastfeeding^{1,2}.

2. There are 2 types of FASD diagnosis in Australia

TRUE

FASD with less than 3 sentinel facial features and FASD with 3 sentinel facial features³.

3. FASD is a problem for Aboriginal communities and lower socio-economic populations

FALSE

FASD occurs in all cross-sections of society; wherever there is alcohol there is FASD⁴. High socio-economic status is a strong predictor for alcohol use⁵ and therefore alcohol use during pregnancy. In addition, 90% of women aged 25 or under stopped drinking when they found out they were pregnant, while only half of those 36 and older stopped drinking upon finding out they were pregnant⁶.

4. Alcohol affects the facial features of a child so you can see if someone has FASD

FALSE

Only 17% of individuals affected by FASD have distinct facial features. Facial dysmorphism only occurs when alcohol is consumed during the first trimester⁷. Prenatal alcohol exposure results in lasting neuropsychological and behavioural consequences affecting all domains of one's life⁸.

5. Australian women are drinking more and at harmful levels

TRUE

Rates of alcohol use, binge drinking and drinking during pregnancy are increasing in young Australian women⁹.

6. FASD is not a common disability in Australia

FALSE

FASD is the leading cause of non-genetic disability in Australia. There are more children born each year with FASD than with Autism Spectrum Disorder, Spina Bifida, Cerebral Palsy, Down Syndrome and SIDS combined¹⁰.

7. No-one can predict whether an alcohol-exposed pregnancy will lead to FASD in a child

TRUE

Based on current data, estimates indicate that 1 in every 13 women who consume alcohol during pregnancy will have a child with FASD¹¹.

8. Medical and Health Professionals are confident asking about alcohol use in pregnancy

FALSE

Only 42% of allied health and medical professionals are confident asking about alcohol use during pregnancy¹². In addition, 64% of allied health and medical professionals feel that asking about alcohol use during pregnancy may make parents feel judged or blamed¹².

9. Only a small number of women drink during pregnancy

FALSE

Research shows that 50-60% of Australian women drink alcohol during pregnancy¹³.

10. The effect of alcohol on a fetus is the same for all pregnancies

FALSE

The 'spectrum' of birth defects is due to the quantity of alcohol consumed, how frequently it was consumed and the timing of consumption during the pregnancy. Other factors can include maternal age, nutritional deficiencies, the ability to metabolise alcohol, and co-morbidity of other physical and mental illnesses¹⁴.

11. Children outgrow the difficulties caused by alcohol consumption during pregnancy

FALSE

FASD is a whole body and lifelong condition; adults must be supported throughout their lifespan¹⁵. Problems that emerge in childhood do not disappear with age, but rather form the beginnings of additional and possibly more severe disorders later in life¹⁶.

12. The average restaurant serving of wine has more than 1 standard drink in it depending on the alcohol content of the wine

TRUE

The average restaurant serving of red wine has 1.6 standard drinks in it. Similarly, an average glass of white wine has 1.4 standard drinks. By having 'one or two' glasses of wine, you may actually be consuming up to 3 standard drinks¹.

13. The risks to a pregnancy from alcohol are much less than the risks associated with soft cheese

FALSE

In Australia, the risk of harm from Listeria (the bacteria that can be present in soft cheeses) is rare. The number of pregnant women who contract Listeria each year in Australia is estimated to be 6.5¹⁷. The number of cases of FASD in Australia is suggested as many as 2% of all Australian babies born¹⁸. With 311,104 babies born in 2016, this suggests that 6222 were born with FASD in one year¹⁹.

14. Mixing an alcoholic drink with lemonade is just as harmful

TRUE

A unit of alcohol has the same effect regardless of what it is mixed with. A unit of alcohol is defined as 10g of ethanol. No matter what the alcohol is mixed with, the effects of the ethanol remain the same¹.

15. Beer, particularly stout, will assist mothers with milk production and breastfeeding

FALSE

Alcohol actually inhibits milk production and also stops the milk flowing freely. The milk stays in the breasts giving the false impression that the breasts are making more milk²⁰.

16. Australian women are less likely to drink alcohol during their pregnancy if their spouse or partner stops drinking

TRUE

Research has shown that 38% of Australian women would be less likely to drink alcohol if their partner or spouse encouraged them to cut back or stop drinking during their pregnancy, and 30% would cease drinking if their partner stopped drinking completely²¹.

17. Drinking alcohol is just as harmful as other recreational drugs

TRUE

Consuming alcohol during pregnancy is just as harmful as recreational drugs such as nicotine, cocaine and methamphetamine²².

18. Because I'm pregnant it means I am able to eat for two

FALSE

Being pregnant, it is advised that you increase your food intake by 340 calories per day in the 2nd trimester and 150 calories in the 3rd trimester²³. Pregnancy is a time of increased nutritional requirements and an opportunity to maintain good dietary behaviour²⁴.

References

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