

# Australian Alcohol Guidelines

## on Pregnancy and Breastfeeding

The National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) *Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol (2020)* provide information on the health risks from alcohol use based on current scientific evidence.

### Guideline if you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy

The Australian Alcohol Guidelines advise that if you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, you should not drink any alcohol in order to prevent the risk of damage to the developing baby.

### If you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, you should not drink alcohol.

This is because:

- At every stage of pregnancy, any alcohol consumed passes directly to your baby. The developing baby's blood alcohol level increases as your blood alcohol level increases.
- Alcohol can damage different organs and systems of the baby's body that are developing during pregnancy, including the heart, kidneys, and lungs.
- A developing baby's brain starts growing very early in pregnancy, often before knowledge of the pregnancy.
- Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can damage the baby's brain and cause Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).
- FASD is a lifelong disability, and people living with this condition can experience physical, behavioural and cognitive challenges.
- The risk of damage to the developing baby increases as the amount and frequency of alcohol consumption increases.
- This does not mean the developing baby will always be impacted if alcohol is consumed during pregnancy. Every pregnancy is different and there are a range of factors that influence the risk to the developing baby.

## Guideline if you are breastfeeding



The Australian Alcohol Guidelines advise that if you are breastfeeding, not drinking alcohol is safest for your baby.

### If you are breastfeeding, not drinking alcohol is safest for your baby.

This is because:

- If alcohol is consumed when breastfeeding, the alcohol crosses into the breastmilk.
- If the baby is breastfed while there is still alcohol in the breastmilk, the baby also drinks the alcohol.
- This can cause the baby to have problems feeding and sleeping.
- A baby's brain keeps developing after it is born. This means a baby's brain is more sensitive to damage from alcohol than an adult brain.

## Talking about your alcohol use



If you have any questions about alcohol and pregnancy, or you need support to stop drinking talk to your doctor, midwife, or obstetrician.

Health professionals speak to lots of people about alcohol. They can answer questions and provide information about services offering support and advice.

## More information and support

- To learn more about alcohol, pregnancy, breastfeeding and FASD, visit: [everymomentmatters.org.au](https://www.everymomentmatters.org.au)
- For help cutting back on alcohol, speak to a doctor. You can also find support, counselling and referrals on the National Alcohol and Other Drug Hotline on **1800 250 015** or [drughelp.gov.au](https://www.drughelp.gov.au)
- To learn more about Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) or find FASD-informed services, contact the FASD Hub at [fasdhub.org.au](https://www.fasdhub.org.au) or NOFASD at [nofasd.org.au](https://www.nofasd.org.au) or **1800 860 613**.
- For more information on the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) Alcohol Guidelines, visit: [nhmrc.gov.au/alcohol](https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/alcohol)



This resource was developed by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) and endorsed and funded by the Australian Government Department of Health.

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Publication - 2021