

# Mixing Alcohol and Breastfeeding

Resource for mothers and partners about drinking alcohol while breastfeeding



## The Importance of Breastfeeding

Breastmilk is the natural food for newborns. It contains all the nutrition your baby needs. The Public Health Agency of Canada, the Dietitians of Canada, the Canadian Paediatric Society and the College of Family Physicians of Canada agree:

- ✓ Babies need only breastmilk for the first 6 months.
- ✓ At 6 months, babies begin to eat solid foods and continue to breastfeed for up to 2 years and beyond.

## Is it OK to have a few drinks at a special event?

- ✓ The safest choice is not to drink alcohol if you are planning to become pregnant, are pregnant, or are breastfeeding. Choose an alcohol-free drink instead.

## What does alcohol do to the milk supply?

- ✓ Alcohol decreases the letdown reflex and this could mean the baby gets less breastmilk during feedings.
- ✓ Drinking alcohol does not increase milk production. In fact, heavy drinking may decrease the milk supply.

## What effect can breastmilk containing alcohol have on a baby?

- ✓ Babies may not like breastmilk containing alcohol. The baby could drink less milk.
- ✓ Babies need more time than an adult to process alcohol. The younger the baby, the more immature his/her system, and the greater the difficulty in clearing the alcohol from his/her body.
- ✓ Mothers who drink heavily while breastfeeding put their baby at risk for poor weight gain, poor growth, and possible developmental delays.

*Mothers and their partners can receive conflicting advice from family, friends and health care providers regarding alcohol use and breastfeeding. Make an informed choice when it comes to drinking alcohol while breastfeeding. Breastfeeding is best for your baby, and it's good for your health, too.*

**If you are breastfeeding, and are thinking about drinking alcohol on a special occasion, follow these simple rules to reduce the risks to your baby:**

- ✔ Limit the amount you drink to 1 or 2 drinks per occasion.\*
- ✔ Drink alcohol after breastfeeding, not before breastfeeding.
- ✔ Allow enough time for the alcohol to be eliminated from your body before the next feeding. On average it takes up to 2 hours for one drink to be eliminated.
- ✔ Pump and store your breastmilk before having a drink so that your baby can continue to receive breastmilk.
- ✔ Invite your partner to limit their alcohol use to support you.

\* Always measure alcoholic drinks.

- ✔ A standard drink is:
  - Beer (5%): 341 ml (12 oz)
  - Wine (12%): 142 ml (5 oz)
  - Spirits (40%): 43 ml (1.5 oz)
- ✔ Check the label – alcohol content varies. Adjust the serving size accordingly.
- ✔ It is important to know how much you are drinking. If you use a large glass you may go over the recommended limits.

**If you are thinking about drinking more than 2 drinks per occasion, follow these simple rules. They will help to reduce the risks to your baby:**

- ✔ Ask your partner or someone you trust to care for your baby until you are completely sober.
- ✔ To keep up your milk supply, pump or hand express whenever your baby would have fed, usually about every three hours. Do this until you have reached the time when the alcohol should have cleared from your milk (about 6 hours after drinking 3 drinks).

**Is alcohol transferred to the breastmilk?**

- ✔ Yes, when a mother drinks alcohol, it goes into her breastmilk.
- ✔ Only time will remove the alcohol from breastmilk. Strategies such as drinking more water, eating, pumping and discarding the milk, and exercising do not help the body remove the alcohol from breastmilk any quicker.



**Looking for advice or information?  
Need help to stop drinking?**

- Motherisk, 1-877-FAS-INFO (1-877-327-4636)
- Your health care provider
- Drug and Alcohol Helpline, 1-800-565-8603
- Health Connection, MLHU, 519-850-2280
- Low Risk Drinking Guidelines, [www.ccsa.ca/2012%20CCSA%20Documents/2012-Canada-Low-Risk-Alcohol-Drinking-Guidelines-Brochure-en.pdf](http://www.ccsa.ca/2012%20CCSA%20Documents/2012-Canada-Low-Risk-Alcohol-Drinking-Guidelines-Brochure-en.pdf)

**Choose alcohol-free recipes:**

Mocktail Madness

<https://www.healthunit.com/uploads/mocktail-madness-booklet.pdf>

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