

Health workers guide to  
**Yarning about  
alcohol and  
pregnancy**



# The best advice for all women is:

**No alcohol is the safest choice when pregnant or planning a pregnancy.**

When a pregnant women drinks, the alcohol passes from the mother's blood across the placenta into the baby's bloodstream.

Alcohol is a toxin that can damage the baby's brain and other bodily organs. Alcohol during pregnancy can cause miscarriage, premature birth and low birth weight babies.

Drinking alcohol while pregnant can also cause Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder or FASD. The **disabilities associated with FASD are permanent but preventable.**

A child born with FASD may have:

- birth defects
- low IQ
- slow to grow
- poor memory
- problems with language
- problems with motor skills and
- be slower to develop mental, social and emotional skills.

A child with FASD may grow up with problems with learning, behaviour, mental health and a range of other disabilities that make their lives very difficult.

## Women want to know

An Australian study has shown that many health professionals are worried about frightening pregnant women and don't ask pregnant women about alcohol. But a survey of Australian women of childbearing age, reported more than 90% said health professionals should ask and advise about alcohol use during pregnancy and they wanted to be told not to drink during pregnancy.

## It is never too late to stop drinking during pregnancy

- The level of risk to the fetus is hard to predict and the risk of harm to the fetus is likely to be low if only small amounts of alcohol have been consumed;
- Stopping drinking at any time in the pregnancy will reduce the risk to the fetus.

## Worried about a mother's alcohol intake?

If you have any worries about a mother's alcohol intake and her health and well-being discuss your concerns with your colleagues or manager. Referral to support services at the earliest opportunity will reduce the risk to the baby and enhance the mother's health and well-being.

## Role of Aboriginal Health Worker

Aboriginal ways of working can be very different to mainstream ways of working, particularly in relation to building trust, rapport and building and maintaining relationships. This may include the involvement or support of families and communities of people who are using substances.

## Referral to drug and alcohol counselling services

For 24 hour drug and alcohol support, information, counselling and referral to services in NSW call the Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS) on **1800 250 015**

## Give feedback to women on their score from the AUDIT-C below.

How often do you have a standard drink containing alcohol?					
Never (0)	Monthly or less (1)	2-4 times a month (2)	2-3 days each week (3)	Most days each week (4)	Score
How many standard drinks containing alcohol do you have on a typical day when you are drinking?					
1 or 2 (0)	3 or 4 (1)	5 or 6 (2)	7-9 (3)	more than 10 (4)	Score
How often do you have six (6) or more standard drinks on one occasion?					
Never (0)	Less than monthly (1)	Monthly (2)	Weekly (3)	Most days each week (4)	Score

**Health risks to mother and baby**  
**1-12 = risk to baby**

- 0 = No risk of harm
- 1 – 2 = Low risk of harm
- 3 – 4 = Medium risk of harm
- 5 + = High risk of harm

Add the number for each question to get your total score

**Total Score**

AUDIT-C Score	Advice for the pregnant woman
<b>0 =</b> no risk of harm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be positive to a woman who scores 0 and encourage her to keep strong and not drink.</li> <li>• Score of 0 means no risk of alcohol-related harm to baby.</li> <li>• Any score over 0 means risk to baby.</li> </ul>
<b>1 - 2 =</b> low risk of harm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell her the risk to baby is low but it is safest not to drink at all in pregnancy.</li> <li>• Risk of harm to baby increases with increasing amounts of alcohol and frequency of drinking.</li> <li>• Encourage her not to drink at all in pregnancy.</li> <li>• Arrange a follow up appointment.</li> </ul>
<b>3 - 4 =</b> medium risk of harm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell her the safest way is NOT to drink any alcohol when pregnant.</li> <li>• She is drinking at risky levels for her health and baby's health.</li> <li>• Risk of harm to growing baby increases with the more alcohol she drinks and how often she drinks.</li> <li>• Tell her the good things about giving up alcohol now for her and baby.</li> <li>• The earlier she stops, the healthier she and her baby will be.</li> <li>• Ask her how she feels about stopping or slowing down drinking.</li> <li>• If she is ready for change, help make a plan for change.</li> <li>• Use Yarning about Alcohol &amp; Pregnancy to help her identify strengths, worries and goals.</li> <li>• If she isn't ready for change, provide education and identify support people and strengths. <b>"If you were going to change your drinking, and I hear you aren't ready now, what would be a reason to change and who would help?"</b></li> <li>• If you are worried she is alcohol dependent, refer her to see a doctor, nurse or midwife.</li> <li>• or ask for help from Alcohol &amp; Other Drugs specialists.</li> <li>• Arrange follow up appointment.</li> </ul>
<b>5+ =</b> high risk of harm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell her she is drinking alcohol at highest level of risk for her health and her baby's health.</li> <li>• This level is associated with higher rates of alcohol dependence and withdrawal problems might show. Ask the woman if she has experienced grog shakes or other symptoms, or warn her if she plans to stop drinking of withdrawal risk.</li> <li>• Identify her strengths and supports using Yarning about Alcohol &amp; Pregnancy tool</li> <li>• Talk to her about worries and risks and there is no safe level of drinking alcohol during pregnancy.</li> <li>• If she wants to slow down or stop drinking, get advice and support from a doctor or nurse as alcohol <b>withdrawal from stopping suddenly could be dangerous for her health and her baby's health.</b></li> <li>• Refer to a specialist alcohol service as she may be at risk of alcohol dependence.</li> <li>• Arrange early follow up appointment and support to see a doctor, nurse or midwife.</li> </ul>

## Standard drinks


= 10 grams Pure Alcohol


Each of these drinks is approximately 1 Standard Drink


= 

= 

= 1

## Estimated Total Standard Drinks


= 1½

= 34


= 8

= 20

For more information about standard drinks google – your room standard drinks.

# Find easy-to-read information and videos on alcohol, pregnancy and FASD at [www.yourroom.health.nsw.gov.au](http://www.yourroom.health.nsw.gov.au)



## Stay strong and healthy story books, posters and postcards

for women, men and young people inform about the risk of drinking alcohol during pregnancy and promote the availability of health services to support pregnant women and women with young babies.



## Stay strong and healthy videos

Four videos at [www.yourroom.health.nsw.gov.au](http://www.yourroom.health.nsw.gov.au) and on one USB. The videos promote the importance of not drinking alcohol during pregnancy for: women and family, men, young people and health professionals.



Order these videos, story books and other drug and alcohol resources for FREE go to [www.yourroom.health.nsw.gov.au](http://www.yourroom.health.nsw.gov.au)



**Stay strong and healthy it's worth it**

– health hints for mum and bub, local services and more.



SHPN: (CPH) 190277

This guide is a 2019 adaptation by the NSW Ministry of Health of a NT Government resource.

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