

You GET BUZZED...

And Your Baby Gets Hurt

A holiday party. Your friend's cookout. Happy hour on a Friday afternoon. It seems like social occasions always call for a drink or two. So even though you're pregnant, one drink won't hurt, right? Wrong.

Deformities. Blindness. Deafness. Speech impediments and mental retardation. Heart and other health problems. These are some of the consequences babies face when their mother decides to drink while pregnant. Your choices impact your child's life...before he or she is even born.

POISONED IN THE WOMB

How Alcohol Impairs Your Baby's Development

When you have a drink - any kind of beer, wine, or liquor - the alcohol goes from your mouth to your stomach, then into your bloodstream. Then it hits your brain, making you feel relaxed, silly and reckless.

The alcohol has a much greater effect on your baby's brain, however, and there's nothing fun or silly about it. The alcohol in your bloodstream passes through the placenta and into your baby's body. Your baby is still developing, so it can't break down the

alcohol as quickly as you can. The alcohol content in the fetus might even be higher than in your bloodstream.

What's the big deal? The alcohol in your baby's body puts it at risk for:

- Miscarriage
- Pre-mature birth
- Stillbirth
- Low birth weight

That's not all - if the baby lives, he or she faces long-term side effects like mental retardation and developmental problems.

Remember, babies grow constantly. During the first trimester, the heart, brain, eyes, arms and legs start to develop. During the third trimester, your baby's body is growing rapidly. Drinking alcohol can interfere with this growth process, especially during the first trimester.



AN UNFAIR START

Jan and Daren's Story

Jan wasn't ready to have her baby yet. She didn't have the nursery finished, or even an overnight bag for the hospital. Her baby was due in July, so she thought she had two more months to prepare.

Then one night in May, Jan went into labor.

Jan was a heavy drinker before she got pregnant. After she found out she was going to have a baby, she started drinking less, but still had a glass of wine or a couple beers almost every night. She had been drinking at home the night she went into labor. When she held her son for the first time, Jan could smell alcohol on him.

Her doctors say that her drinking was probably the reason that Jan's son, Daren, was born early. It's definitely the reason why he suffers from Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS). Poor Daren was born severely underweight and had to stay in the intensive care unit for months because his organs weren't formed yet. He was also addicted to alcohol, and Jan watched him undergo painful withdrawal symptoms during his first days of life.



Now at age four, Daren still has symptoms of FAS. His face is deformed with slanted eyes and a pushed up nose. He walks with a strange tilt and has a hard time keeping up with the other children in his preschool as they learn their colors and shapes.

For Daren, life will be a struggle as he copes with his learning disabilities. Jan will face the tough job of raising a mentally retarded child. If Jan had put down the bottle while she was pregnant, all of this could have been avoided.



JUST A SIP?

No Such Thing as a "Safe" Amount

Think it's okay to drink a little alcohol as long as you don't get buzzed? Think again: Even if you don't feel it, your baby's body is absorbing tons of alcohol. Even a little can do damage to vital organs, like the brain, spinal cord, central nervous system and heart.

According to research, there is no "safe" amount of alcohol to drink while pregnant. That's why most doctors advise women not to drink at all while they're expecting. Whether it's beer, wine, or liquor, just one drink can put your baby's health at risk.

Would you take that risk with your own life?.

DRINKING AND BREASTFEEDING

Most doctors will advise you to refrain from drinking alcohol if you plan to breastfeed your child.

There are several reasons for this: First, alcohol can pass from your bloodstream into your breast milk. So, when you have a glass of wine or a shot of liquor, that alcohol can be passed to your child. In fact, breast milk can contain the same amount of alcohol as your blood. Even if you drink just a small amount, it will have a larger effect on your child because your baby is so much smaller than you.

Second, sometimes alcohol can reduce the amount of breast milk that you produce. Women who drink while breastfeeding may not produce as much milk as other women until the alcohol passes through their system. Often, babies won't get enough milk in the hours after their mothers have been drinking.

Some research has shown that babies whose mothers drink don't learn to crawl or walk as quickly as babies with sober mothers.

It's important to stay away from drinking alcohol while breastfeeding. If you do end up drinking, make sure you wait several hours before breastfeeding to give the alcohol a chance to pass through your system.