



ALCOHOL, PREGNANCY AND PREVENTION OF FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER

WHAT MEN CAN DO TO HELP

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is the leading known cause of developmental disability. FASD is the result of exposure to alcohol in utero and is believed to affect 1% of the population. While men's alcohol use is not a direct contributor to FASD, there are many ways that men can help to prevent FASD.

Preventing FASD is about more than telling women not to drink alcohol during pregnancy - in fact, this approach can often lead to more harm than good. Researchers and service providers who are part of the Canada FASD Research Network have some suggestions for men who want to make a difference.

1 Take a 'pregnant pause'. If your partner, friend, sister, co-worker or another woman you know is pregnant, you may want to consider taking a 'pause' from drinking as a way of showing support. Whether it's for a month, three months or the entire pregnancy, remaining alcohol-free can be helpful and encouraging for many women.

2 Be a good host. When entertaining friends or family or having a night out, offer non-alcoholic beverages and avoid pressuring women to drink (pregnant or not). Some women continue to drink alcohol during pregnancy because they have a hard time saying 'no' when it is expected that they drink in certain social situations or when they haven't told others about their pregnancy. As a host offer 'mocktails' and other non-alcoholic options for drinks, and make sure that everyone feels part of the fun whether or not they are drinking alcohol.

3 Minimize harms. Most of us don't drink on our own -- our drinking habits are shaped by those around us. Support a 'culture of moderation' by taking a look at your own drinking and working to minimize any harmful effects that your own drinking might have on yourself or others. Taking a look at Canada's Low Risk Drinking Guidelines is a good place to start (www.ccsa.ca).

4 Help change negative perceptions. When talking about FASD and alcohol use during pregnancy, avoid being critical of women who do drink during pregnancy or blame women for not caring about their babies or for being ignorant. This type of judgment creates a climate of fear and shame where women can feel discouraged and avoid seeking help to address their problems with alcohol. It also prevents us all from having productive conversations about how to prevent FASD.

5 Be compassionate. For some women, stopping drinking can be a struggle. Often, drinking can be a way for women to cope with difficult life circumstances such as depression or isolation. Assume that women are doing the best they can and let them know that you're willing to help when they're ready to make a change.

6 Be an active role model. Confusion about what is a safe level of alcohol use during pregnancy remains. Support pregnant women by telling family, friends, and anyone offering her alcohol that there is no safe time to drink alcohol during pregnancy and no safe amount.

7 Support pregnant women no matter what. Pregnancy can be a time of enormous pressure and scrutiny for women. Women receive advice and information from health care providers, websites, friends, family, and even random strangers. Respect the choices that women make to keep themselves and their babies healthy. It's never too late for a woman to stop drinking during pregnancy or to make other healthy changes in her life.

8 Remember that healthy babies need healthy mothers. During pregnancy, the effect of alcohol on the fetus is influenced by things like nutrition, stress, other substance use, and numerous other factors. Support women's health before, during, and after pregnancy. This contributes to a society where women's health and well-being is valued in of itself and all the time rather than only during pregnancy.

9 Remember that FASD affects everyone. Many people continue to believe that only certain groups of women drink alcohol during pregnancy or are responsible for FASD. Remind people that FASD occurs wherever pregnant women drink alcohol and that discrimination prevents us from having frank conversations about the root causes of FASD and overall solutions.



10 Think big. Most women are aware that drinking alcohol during pregnancy can have harmful effects. Women who continue to drink after learning they are pregnant may be struggling with stopping. Addiction is widespread in our society and is often a concern before pregnancy. Advocate for a range of treatment options in your community and encourage services to prioritize access to services for pregnant women with addiction concerns.

11 Get involved in preventing violence. Current or past experiences of violence are one of the major reasons a woman continues to drink during pregnancy. Recognize and speak out against all forms of violence. Mentor and teach young boys about how to be men in ways that don't involve degrading or abusing girls and women. Question your own attitudes. Lead by example.

12 Plan ahead. Almost half of all pregnancies are unplanned. Be involved in making decisions about birth control and support your partner in making choices that are healthy for her and that are right for your relationship. When you're ready for fatherhood, take some time to think about the role of alcohol in your life and your partner's life: *In what ways is alcohol part of my life now? How will alcohol be part of my life as a father?* Babies need healthy fathers, too.

This information sheet was developed by members of the Canada FASD Research Network's Action Team on FASD Prevention from a Women's Health Determinants Perspective.

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