



Campaigning
For Equality

Women's Equality Women's Health – Alcohol in Pregnancy



An advice leaflet
for Usdaw Members



Alcohol in pregnancy

This leaflet is designed to raise women's awareness of the possible implications of alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

At the moment there is no proven safe limit for alcohol consumption when pregnant.

The Chief Medical Officers for the UK recommend that if you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant, the safest approach is not to drink alcohol at all.

However, this leaflet it is not intended to alarm women who have the occasional drink. Light drinking is unlikely to be harmful but the only way to guarantee a baby won't be affected is not to drink at all.

Drinking in pregnancy

Health professionals advise that you should be careful about alcohol consumption in pregnancy and not to consume any alcohol at all.

There are several reasons why it is better to avoid alcohol while you are pregnant.

- It puts your developing baby at risk especially in the early stage of pregnancy.
- Studies have shown a relationship between mothers who drink moderate amounts of alcohol each week (more than 10 units per week) and slight prematurity and lower birth weight in babies born to them.
- Regular drinking of large amounts of alcohol has been shown to cause serious damage to the developing baby (more than 40 units per week).
- Drinking alcohol at this time could make you feel more nauseous (sick).

If you are worried about drinking too much during pregnancy

Get support and advice. You can do that by contacting your doctor, midwife or health visitor or any of the organisations listed at the end of this leaflet.

Excessive drinking during pregnancy

Excessive drinking during pregnancy can cause serious damage to the developing baby. This is known as Foetal Alcohol Syndrome.

Foetal Alcohol Syndrome is the name given to a group of physical and mental defects that occur as the direct result of heavy alcohol consumption during pregnancy.



What is Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS)?

Foetal Alcohol Syndrome is the name given to a group of physical and mental defects that occur as the direct result of heavy alcohol consumption during pregnancy. Foetal Alcohol Syndrome is the leading known cause of learning/mental difficulties.

How common is Foetal Alcohol Syndrome?

There are more babies born with FAS than there are with Down's Syndrome. The World Health Organisation (WHO) figures for FAS are 1 per 100.

What are the signs of Foetal Alcohol Syndrome?

There are many signs of FAS, including:

- Physical disabilities, learning difficulties, behavioural and emotional problems.
- A particular pattern of facial characteristics, including flattened nasal bridge, drooping eyelids, no ridges between nose and mouth.
- Small at birth and slow at reaching developmental milestones.
- Poor co-ordination, short attention span, possibly hyperactive or lethargic.

Is there a cure for Foetal Alcohol Syndrome?

No, there is no cure for Foetal Alcohol Syndrome. It is an irreversible, lifelong condition that affects every aspect of a child's life and the lives of his or her family members. However, FAS is the only birth defect that can be completely prevented.

Can FAS be treated?

Early diagnosis and intervention can make an enormous difference for the child's future attainment. Up to the age of 10 or 11 there is a small window of opportunity. During this time alternative coping strategies can be developed, to work around the difficulties faced because of damaged areas of the brain. However, time is of the essence. The facial characteristics in the majority of children with FAS changes as they get older, the characteristics tend to diminish, making it even more difficult to obtain a diagnosis. Without a diagnosis, vital services that would be available to help prevent secondary disabilities and to help the child achieve his/her full potential, are very difficult for carers to access for the child and themselves.

However, there is evidence that often only the clearest cut cases are being diagnosed. Many children with less pronounced neurological damage are almost certainly going unnoticed. If you are worried and believe your child could be affected, see your GP.

There is no cure for Foetal Alcohol Syndrome. It is an irreversible, lifelong condition that affects every aspect of a child's life and the lives of his or her family members.



Useful contacts

The following organisations offer support and a wide range of information:

Alcohol Concern

A registered charity with the stated aim of working to increase the range and quality of services available to those with alcohol related problems.

Tel: 0203 815 8920
web: www.alcoholconcern.org.uk

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy

Can help you locate a counsellor or psychotherapist.

Tel: 01455 883300
email: bacp@bacp.org.uk
web: www.bacp.co.uk

Institute of Alcohol Studies

It is an educational body and can provide information to the general public.

Tel: 0207 222 4001
web: www.ias.org.uk

Patient UK

The website has a directory of self help and support groups.

web: www.patient.co.uk

If you want further information on Foetal Alcohol Syndrome contact:

Foetal Alcohol Syndrome Trust
Unit 8, The Gallery
54 Marston Street
Oxford OX4 1LF

Helpline: 01608 811 599
web: www.fasdtrust.co.uk



How much to drink

AL Anon Family Groups

An organisation for the family and friends of problem drinkers.

Tel: 0207 403 0888
web: www.al-anonuk.org.uk

Alcoholics Anonymous

Offers help to people who may have a personal drinking problem.

Tel: 0800 917 7650
email: help@alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk
www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk

Usdaw contacts

To find out more about the work of the Divisional Equalities Forums and Usdaw's equality work or about joining Usdaw contact:

South Wales and Western Division

Cardiff Office
Tel: 029 2073 1131
email: cardiff@usdaw.org.uk

Eastern Division

Waltham Cross Office
Tel: 01992 709280
email: walthamx@usdaw.org.uk

Midlands Division

Redditch Office
Tel: 01527 406290
email: redditch@usdaw.org.uk

North Eastern Division

Leeds Office
Tel: 0113 232 1320
email: leeds@usdaw.org.uk

Scottish Division

Glasgow Office
Tel: 0141 427 6561
email: glasgow@usdaw.org.uk

Southern Division

Morden Office
Tel: 020 8687 5950
email: morden@usdaw.org.uk

North West Division

Warrington Office
Tel: 01925 578050
email: warrington@usdaw.org.uk

Equalities Section

Usdaw
188 Wilmslow Road
Manchester M14 6LJ
Tel: 0161 224 2804
email: equalitymatters@usdaw.org.uk



Improving worker's lives –
Winning for members
www.usdaw.org.uk/equalities

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