

**Do you drink or use other drugs?
You could be harming more than
just your health.**



Simple questions. Straight answers
about the risks of alcohol and drugs
for women.

Why am I being asked about alcohol and drugs?

Asking these questions is part of good quality health care, just like asking about tobacco use, diet, and exercise. It's important to be honest about how much you drink and which drugs you use. That way your health care provider can help you learn about your risk factors and can offer you the best care.

What is a drug and why should I worry about it?

A drug is a chemical that can have effects on the body and mind. Sometimes it causes changes in how you feel, and can cause changes in the way you act. Some drugs — like alcohol, nicotine in cigarettes or e-cigarettes, or caffeine — can be habit-forming or addictive. Using tobacco and misusing alcohol and other drugs can put you at risk for health problems.



Do alcohol and other drugs affect women and men differently?

Yes. A woman's body can have stronger reactions to alcohol and other drugs. In fact, many women become addicted faster than men and die sooner than men from drug or alcohol misuse. Health studies show that women who use alcohol regularly increase their risk of breast cancer.

If you become pregnant, alcohol and drugs could harm your baby, too. The baby can be affected even before you know you are pregnant. Women who drink while pregnant may have babies with developmental delays or disabilities. They are at increased risk of premature birth.

How much can I drink?

Moderate use is one drink per day. Healthy women should not have more than 3 drinks in a day, and no more than a total of 7 drinks in a week. Pregnant women should not drink. Older women should check with their doctors about what limits are best for their health.

What is a standard drink?

- 1 can (12 oz.) of beer or ale
- 1 glass (5 oz.) of wine
- 1 single shot (1 1/2 oz.) of hard liquor (vodka, tequila, whiskey, scotch, rum)
- 1 small glass (4 oz.) of sherry, liqueur

Drink Equivalents



12 ounces

=



5 ounces

=



1 1/2 ounces



While these are the standard measures, you may receive a different amount when you are served a drink.

How can drugs and alcohol affect me?

If you drink too much or use drugs, you may not be able to make good decisions. You may have unsafe sex or may drive under the influence. Alcohol or drug misuse could also cause legal or financial problems.

It's not safe to drink:

- If you are pregnant
- If you are able to get pregnant, and not actively preventing a pregnancy (such as by not having sex or by using a birth control method)
- If you are taking certain medications
- If you are driving or using heavy equipment
- If you have a history of problems with alcohol

What should I do if I want to cut down on or stop my drinking?

- Once you decide to cut down on or stop alcohol use, ask a friend or family member who can support you for help
- You can tell people that you'd prefer something non-alcoholic or water

If you find you have trouble stopping, ask your doctor to refer you for help.



I don't plan to get pregnant. Why say so much about babies?

About 50% of pregnancies are not planned. Unless you are not able to get pregnant, or are not having sex, you are at risk of becoming pregnant. The safest choice is to either prevent pregnancy or plan for it. You can talk to your doctor about good ways to prevent pregnancy if you're not ready, or about ways to prepare your body for pregnancy, if that's what you want.

What do I need to do now if I might want to have a baby?

The healthier you are, the better likelihood of a healthy pregnancy. Don't drink alcohol. Don't use tobacco, marijuana, or illegal drugs. Talk to your doctor about which medicines are okay for you to take. Some medicines, like over-the-counter cold medication, can have alcohol in them, which can harm your baby. Read the labels of any medicine or supplement before taking it. Also, start taking a prenatal vitamin.



PREGNANT WOMEN'S CONCERNS ABOUT ALCOHOL

Is it okay to drink while I'm pregnant?

Drinking is not safe for you or your unborn baby. Alcohol in beer, wine, and hard liquor can all be harmful.

What can happen to my baby or me if I drink while I'm pregnant?

Problems your baby could have:

- Born too early
- Brain or heart damage
- Deformed face and limbs
- Behavior problems
- Problems at school

Problems you could have:

- Miscarriage or early birth
- Liver damage or heart trouble
- Balance problems that may lead to a fall



I know someone who drank when she was pregnant. Her baby seems fine. Is that possible?

Some babies may seem fine, but some may have problems that are not noticed until grade school. Some children may not seem to have any health problems, but may have lifelong trouble making good decisions. Some pregnancies are affected, and others are not.

What is FASD?

FASD (*Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders*) covers the full range of disabilities and problems that a baby, child, or adult may have when the mother drank during pregnancy.

FAS (*Fetal Alcohol Syndrome*) refers specifically to the permanent brain damage children suffer because their mothers drank alcohol while pregnant.

These children have difficulty learning and making good decisions, poor memory and attention, and behavior problems.



What if I drink and find out that I'm pregnant?

Talk to your doctor or health care professional. They are there to help you. You can make a positive change about alcohol use, and when you do, you're doing something good for your baby and yourself.

What if I smoke cigarettes or use nicotine while I'm pregnant?

Tobacco smoke can increase the risk of low birthweight or stillbirth. Smoking and nicotine use during pregnancy and after a baby is born has been linked to infant death (SUIDS). You and your baby will also be exposed to some of the same toxic ingredients when using e-cigarettes or vaping. It's also safest to stay away from these devices.

What should I do if I want to stop drinking?

- Don't spend a lot of time with people who drink.
- Don't buy alcohol or have it in your house.
- Replace drinking with a healthy activity, like going for a walk or another enjoyable activity.
- Have something non-alcoholic instead of a drink containing alcohol.



DRUGS AND YOUR BABY

What can happen to my baby if I use drugs while I'm pregnant?

Different drugs can have different effects on your growing baby. Drugs your doctor prescribes, over-the-counter medicines, marijuana, and illegal drugs can all affect your baby. Some drugs are addictive and can cause problems for you and your baby before and after birth. Be sure all your health care providers know when you're pregnant. It's very important to tell them about all the medicines or drugs you're using and discuss ways to keep you and your baby as safe as possible.

I've heard that some women use marijuana for morning sickness. Is that safe?

More research is needed to better understand how marijuana may affect you and your baby during pregnancy. If you're using marijuana and are pregnant, or are planning to become pregnant, talk to your doctor.

Can over-the-counter medicines like diet pills or pain medicines hurt my baby?

Some over-the-counter medicines can cause birth defects like heart problems in your baby. There is also the risk of stillbirth. Read labels and talk to your pharmacist or your health care provider about which medicines are safe for you and your baby.

If I think I have a drug problem, who can help me?

Talk to your health care provider. He or she can help you decide what steps you can take to safely stop drinking or using drugs. Remember, your conversations with your doctor are private. For help finding treatment, you can contact the Massachusetts Substance Use Helpline at toll-free 1-800-327-5050 or visit HelplineMA.org.

What should I do if I'm on methadone or buprenorphine and pregnant?

If you're on methadone and you're pregnant, don't stop taking it. Talk to your doctor or treatment prescriber. It is safe to be on methadone during pregnancy.

If you are on buprenorphine and are pregnant, don't stop. Talk to your doctor or treatment prescriber. It is also safe to be on buprenorphine during pregnancy.



If I'm pregnant and using drugs and stop today, will it make any difference to my baby?

Yes. It is always the right time to make a healthy decision. But some drugs and medications can make you sick if you stop too quickly or on your own. Before you stop, talk to your doctor or a provider that you trust. You can get help stopping or cutting down in a way that is safe for you and your baby.

What if I get sick and need to take medicine, what should I do?

Some medicines are safe and some aren't. Your doctor knows which are safer. Be sure your doctor knows you're pregnant. Talk to your doctor before you take any over-the-counter medications. Read labels carefully and check ingredients of anything you take – whether you got it from your doctor or from a store. Most medicines have a warning on the label that can help you decide if it is safe to take while you are pregnant.

What about drinking or taking drugs while I'm breastfeeding my baby?

Breastfeeding is often the safest and healthiest choice for babies. But substances like alcohol, nicotine, and marijuana get into the breastmilk when you use them before nursing. Talk with your doctor about any medications, alcohol, or drugs you're taking while breastfeeding.

Where can I go for help?

Steps you take now can help you now as well as in your future.

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health Bureau of Substance Addiction Services is committed to ensuring that pregnant women with substance use issues have speedy access to treatment resources.

Massachusetts Substance Use Helpline

Toll-free: 1-800-327-5050 or HelplineMA.org

TTY: Use MassRelay 711 or 1-800-720-3480

Massachusetts Smokers' Helpline

Toll-free: 1-800-QUIT-NOW or 1-800-784-8669

www.makesmokinghistory.org

AA Meetings

www.aa.org/pages/en_US/find-aa-resources

NA Meetings

www.na.org/meetingsearch

You can find more information about alcohol and drugs from these resources:

Massachusetts Department of Public Health Bureau of Substance Addiction Services

mass.gov/dph/bsas

Massachusetts Health Promotion Clearinghouse

mass.gov/MAclearinghouse

The Journey Project for Pregnant and Parenting Women in Recovery

journeyrecoveryproject.com

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Alcohol and Public Health — www.cdc.gov/alcohol

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders — www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/fasd

National Center for Injury Prevention — www.cdc.gov/injury

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)

www.drugabuse.gov

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA)

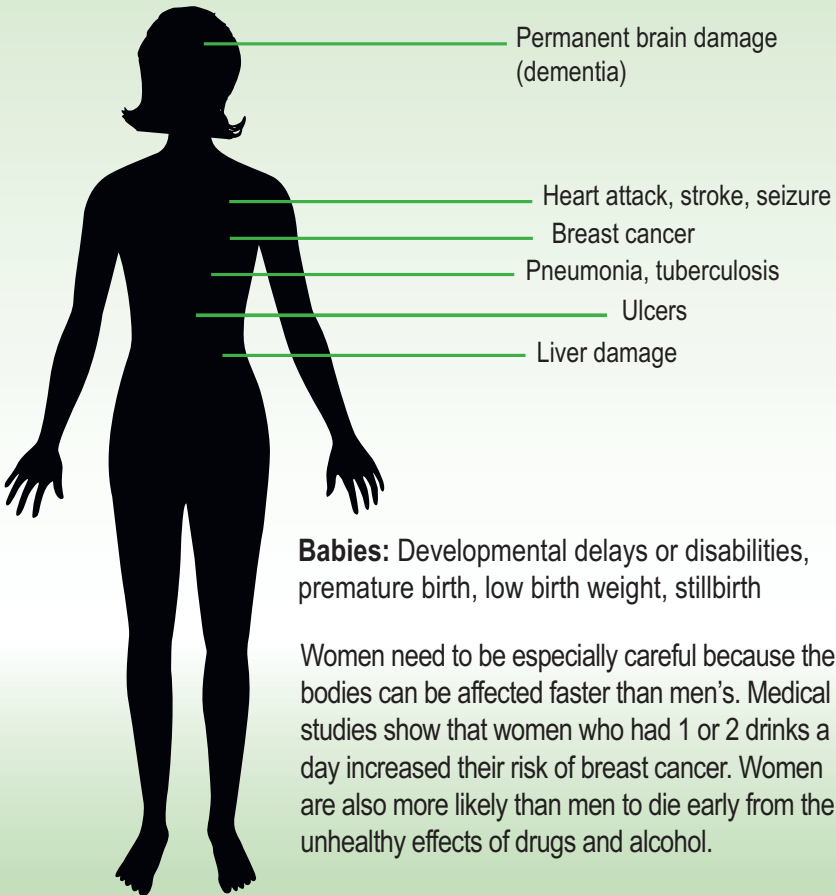
www.niaaa.nih.gov

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

www.samhsa.gov

Effects of unhealthy, long-term use of alcohol and other drugs

- Risk of making some medications less effective or cause a reaction
- Alcohol or drug addiction
- Risk of getting HIV/AIDS, hepatitis B or C
- Overdose or death



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