



ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION IN BREASTFEEDING

Information in this leaflet is general in nature and should not take the place of advice from your health care provider. Breastmilk provides optimum nutrition for babies and conveys many additional health benefits to both mother and baby.

Alcohol in breastfeeding

Alcohol in the bloodstream passes into breast milk and reaches a concentration similar to the mother's blood level. The level of alcohol in the milk will fall as the mother metabolises the alcohol in her bloodstream. Babies metabolise and excrete alcohol more slowly than adults¹. It has been reported that even relatively low levels of drinking may reduce the mother's milk supply and possibly cause irritability, poor feeding and sleep disturbances in the infant².

The current Australian guidelines recommend that for women who are breastfeeding, not drinking is the safest option³.

The long-term effects of daily use of alcohol on the infant are unclear. Some evidence indicates that infant growth and motor function may be negatively affected by one drink or more daily, but other studies have not confirmed these findings⁴.

Practical Advice for breastfeeding mothers who choose to drink alcohol³

- Women should avoid alcohol in the first month after delivery until breastfeeding is well established.

After that:

- alcohol intake should be limited to no more than two standard drinks a day
- women should avoid drinking immediately before breastfeeding
- women who wish to drink alcohol could consider expressing milk in advance.

It is not necessary to pump and discard breast milk, except for the mother's comfort when she is not feeding for an extended time.

It takes approximately 2 hours for the average woman to completely eliminate 1 standard alcoholic drink and therefore 4 hours for 2 drinks, 6 hours for 3 drinks, and so on⁵.

***1 standard drink contains 10g alcohol. This approximates to 260mL of full strength beer= 475mL of light beer= 100mL wine= 30mL spirits**

References:

1. Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. Exposure to Psychotropic Medications and other substances during Pregnancy and Lactation. A Handbook for Health Care Providers. 2007
2. Alcohol and Women's Health. Australian Alcohol Guidelines. Fact Sheet.
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3. Australian Guidelines to reduce health risks from drinking alcohol. 2009. National Health and Medical Research Council
http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/files_nhmrc/publications/attachments/ds10-alcohol.pdf
4. Lactmed; Dug and Lactation Database. National Library of Medicine. Available at <http://toxnet.nlm.nih.gov/> Accessed 14th August, 2009.
5. Giglia RC & Binns CW. Alcohol and Lactation: a systematic review. Nutrition and Dietetics 2006 63:103-116

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For more information call MotherSafe: NSW Medications in Pregnancy and Breastfeeding Service on 9382 6539 (Sydney Metropolitan Area) or 1800 647 848 (Non-Metropolitan Area) Monday -Friday 9am-5pm (excluding public holidays)