HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH WHEN YOU’RE HAVING A BABY?
Did you know?
Alcohol is a poison, as well as being addictive. Alcohol in a foetus has a toxic effect on developing cells and organs, especially in the brain, where it kills cells.

Does having a baby mean not having a drink?
Just because you’re pregnant, your life doesn’t need to be on hold. You still see the same people and do the same things – which, for many of us, includes having a drink. But things aren’t quite so straightforward now. You know that everything you eat and drink can affect your baby. But should you stop drinking for the entire nine months? Or is there such a thing as a ‘safe’ alcohol limit?
This booklet offers information about drinking – when you’re trying to conceive, during pregnancy, and while breastfeeding – so you can decide what’s best for you and your baby.
Pregnancy and alcohol

How does alcohol affect your unborn baby? When you drink, alcohol reaches your baby through the placenta. But the baby cannot process it as fast as you can, and is exposed to greater amounts of alcohol for longer than you are. And too much exposure to alcohol can seriously affect the baby’s development.

For this reason, you may want to avoid alcohol altogether. However, medical evidence suggests that, as long as you drink no more than one or two units of alcohol once or twice a week, and avoid getting drunk, it is unlikely that your baby will be affected.

These are the NHS-recommended maximum allowances:
- ordinary women can drink up to 2 to 3 units of alcohol a day
- pregnant women can drink up to 1 to 2 units of alcohol no more than once or twice a week
- men can drink up to 3 to 4 units of alcohol a day

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**WOMEN**

Daily limit
2-3 units

**PREGNANT WOMEN**

No more than 1-2 units, once or twice a week

See pages 6/7 for more information on alcohol units and limits.
Conception

How much can I drink?
Nobody really knows how much alcohol is "safe" to drink before your chances of conceiving are reduced. But we do know that heavy drinking can disrupt menstrual cycles, and that women who drink heavily can find it harder to get pregnant.

If you are trying for a baby, it's advisable to keep your drinking within the NHS guidelines for pregnant women. There are simple steps you can take and organisations that can help you. See page 10 "If you want to cut down", for details.

Should my partner stop drinking?
There are good reasons why your partner might decide to avoid drinking excessively if you are trying for a baby:
- alcohol kills sperm, and excess alcohol can make a man less fertile
- heavy drinking can cause temporary impotence.

In short, you have less chance of becoming pregnant if your partner drinks too much. And while you may not want to make him stop, you can help make sure he knows the facts.

How will drinking affect my baby?
Many women go off the taste of alcohol when they're pregnant. But if you're not one of them, and are wondering if it's okay to have a drink, here are the facts.

Did you know?
Don't think of units in the same way you might think of calories and 'save them up'. For example, if you didn't drink at all last week, that doesn't mean you can safely drink a lot this week.
When you’re pregnant

The effects of alcohol
When you drink, alcohol passes from your blood, through the placenta, to your baby. A baby's liver is one of the last organs to develop fully and does not mature until the latter half of pregnancy. Therefore, your baby cannot process alcohol as well as you can and is exposed to greater amounts of alcohol for longer periods of time.

Alcohol is not just dangerous for the baby in the first three months. If you drink heavily during pregnancy, a particular group of problems could develop, known as Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS). Children with this syndrome have:
- restricted growth
- facial abnormalities
- learning and behavioural disorders.

Regular on-going drinking in pregnancy above the levels recommended by the NHS, as well as binge drinking, may be associated with lesser forms of the full FAS.

The risks of heavy drinking during pregnancy
Heavy drinking during all three stages of pregnancy can result in problems:

First trimester (months 1–3)
- damage to developing organs and nervous system, resulting in later mental and physical problems
- major structural abnormalities
- spontaneous miscarriage.

Second trimester (months 4–6)
- continued risk of damage to the central nervous system
- continued risk of miscarriage.

Third trimester (months 7–9)
- disruption to general growth and development
- dulled mental abilities
- minor abnormalities
- low birth-weight.

"I went out drinking a couple of times before I knew I was pregnant. I was worried I might have harmed my baby so I talked to my doctor. I then made sure I was extra careful during the rest of my pregnancy."

It may be that you weren’t actually trying for a baby, but have conceived by accident. If this has happened to you, reduce your alcohol consumption to within the recommended guidelines as soon as you find out you are pregnant and talk to your GP or midwife."
How many units am I drinking?

**Beer, ale and stout**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Car (440ml)</th>
<th>Can (330ml)</th>
<th>Pint</th>
<th>Lane</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Ordinary strength (3.5 – 4%)**  
(John Smith's, Boddington's, Guinness) | 1.8 units   | 1.8 units   | 2.3 units |      |
| **Premium strength (5%)**  
(Dry Blackthorn, Strongbow) | 1.8 units   | 2.2 units   | 2.8 units |      |
| **Strong (6%+)**  
(Special Brew, Special Abbey, Youngs) | 2 units+     | 2.6 units+  | 3.4 units+ |      |

**Cider**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Car (550ml)</th>
<th>Can (330ml)</th>
<th>Pint</th>
<th>Lane</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Ordinary strength (6%)**  
(Dry Blackthorn, Strongbow) | 2 units     | 2.6 units   | 3.4 units | 6 units |
| **Strong (9%+)**  
(Tennent's Super, Special Brew) | 3 units+     | 4 units+   | 5 units+ | 9 units+ |

**Lager**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Car (440ml)</th>
<th>Can (330ml)</th>
<th>Pint</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Ordinary strength (3.5 – 4%)**  
(Carling Black Label, Fosters) | 1.8 units   | 1.8 units   | 2.3 units |
| **Premium strength (5%)**  
(Stella Artois, Carlsberg Export, Grolsch, Kronenbourg 1664) | 2 units     | 2.2 units   | 3 units |
| **Super strength (9%+)**  
(Tennent's Super, Special Brew) | 3 units+     | 4 units+   | 5 units+ |
Here's a guide to the most popular drinks and their alcohol unit content.

### Alcopops

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 drink (125 ml)</th>
<th>1.4 units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ordinary strength (6%)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Smirnoff Ice, Bacardi Breezer, WKD, Reaf)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Shots

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Small measure (30 ml)</th>
<th>Large measure (60 ml)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tequila, Sambuca</td>
<td>1 unit</td>
<td>1.3 units</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Spirits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Small measure (30 ml)</th>
<th>Large measure (60 ml)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gin, rum, vodka &amp; whisky</td>
<td>1 unit</td>
<td>1.4 units</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Wine (red or white)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alcohol content (%)</th>
<th>Small glass (175 ml)</th>
<th>Large bottle (750 ml)</th>
<th>Standard measure (120 ml)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11%</td>
<td>1.9 units</td>
<td>2.8 units</td>
<td>8.3 units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12%</td>
<td>2.1 units</td>
<td>3 units</td>
<td>9 units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13%</td>
<td>2.3 units</td>
<td>3.3 units</td>
<td>9.6 units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14%</td>
<td>2.5 units</td>
<td>3.5 units</td>
<td>10.5 units</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Fortified wine

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Standard measure (120 ml)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15%</td>
<td>1.5 units</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>