Drinking for *two*?

There is no shortage of advice about pregnancy - what to do and, more often, what not to do. Sometimes the advice can be contradictory and each woman (and pregnancy) is different. Some women stop drinking alcohol altogether when they become pregnant. Others want to protect the baby but don’t want to feel the odd-one-out at social occasions. What’s the best advice?

**I want to get pregnant.**
**Should I drink less?**

If you are trying to get pregnant, you need to be aware that the amount you drink can reduce your fertility and ability to conceive. Excessive drinking, especially getting drunk, can even lead to a miscarriage in the early stages of pregnancy. The safest approach is to reduce your alcohol consumption. So if you’re trying to become pregnant, drink no more than 1 or 2 units of alcohol once or twice a week and avoid getting drunk.
I'm 6 months pregnant. Does it still matter what I drink?

When a pregnant woman drinks alcohol, the alcohol passes to the baby through the placenta and can affect the baby's development. This happens throughout the pregnancy, not just in the first few weeks. Excessive drinking can lead to low weight at birth and can also affect the physical and mental development of the child. Getting drunk is particularly risky. The advice is therefore the same as for women trying to become pregnant – avoid getting drunk and drink no more than 1 or 2 units once or twice a week.

Do I still need to be careful after the baby's born?

Alcohol passes to the baby in small amounts in breast milk. The milk will smell different to the baby and may affect his or her feeding, sleeping or digestion. The best advice is to avoid drinking shortly before a baby’s feed. Whether you’re breastfeeding or not, the recommended daily benchmark for women of between 2 and 3 units of alcohol a day is a useful guide. The benchmark applies whether you drink every day, once or twice a week, or occasionally. Drinking too much can leave you feeling the worse for wear and sometimes a little down. Not necessarily the best preparation for those 4am feeds!