

# Alcohol and Pregnancy

Many women in the United States drink alcohol responsibly, but some drink in amounts that are not safe. It is important to learn about drinking in moderation. Heavy drinking is called at-risk drinking because it can affect your health, including your fertility, menstrual cycle, cancer risk, and risk of injuries. At-risk drinking also can affect your judgment and lead to risky sexual behavior. Knowing when alcohol use is unsafe is the first step in getting help.

## *This pamphlet explains*

- At risk drinking
- How alcohol can affect your health
- The risks of drinking alcohol during pregnancy
- How to tell if you have a drinking problem
- How to get help

## *At-Risk Drinking*

For women, moderate drinking means drinking one alcoholic drink a day. At risk drinking means drinking more than seven drinks a week or three drinks in a single day. At risk drinking also includes binge drinking. For women, binge drinking is having four or more drinks in about two hours.

Binge drinking is a major problem among women in the United States. About 13 in 100 adult women report binge drinking in the last 30 days, according to the centers of Disease Control and Prevention. During each binge, they have at least five drinks. About 15 in 100 teen girls also report binge drinking.

For some women, drinking any amount of alcohol is at risk drinking period these include women who are

- Unable to keep their drinking at a moderate level
- Younger than the age of 21
- Pregnant or planning of pregnancy
- About to drive or perform a task that may result in injury
- Taking prescription or over the counter medications that interact with alcohol

## How Alcohol Can Affect Your Health

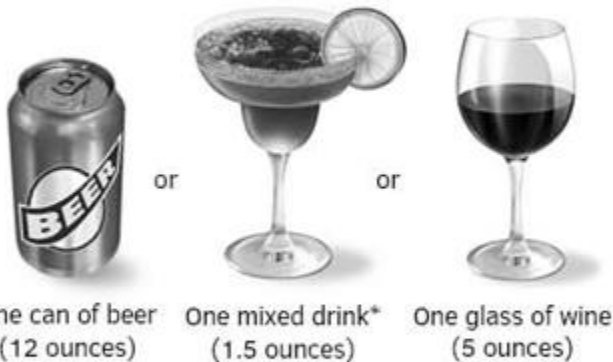
Women and men react differently to alcohol. A chemical in the body that breaks down alcohol is less active in women than in men. This means that more of the alcohol that women drink enters their bloodstreams. Women typically weigh less than men and have less body water, so the alcohol a woman drinks is not diluted as quickly as the alcohol a man drinks. A woman will become intoxicated more quickly and have a higher blood alcohol level than a man who drinks the same amount. Heavy alcohol use puts women at risk of many health problems (read the box "Health Risks of At-Risk Drinking for Women).

Regular at-risk drinking can lead to alcohol dependence (also called alcoholism). Doctors also may call this alcohol use disorder. Women who are alcohol dependent keep using alcohol even when it causes problems with their health, safety, or relationships. Alcohol use disorder is a disease with the following symptoms:

- Craving- a strong urge to drink
- Loss of control- after starting to drink, not being able to stop
- Dependence- alcohol withdrawal symptoms, such as nausea, sweating, shakiness, and anxiety after stopping drinking
- Tolerance- the need to drink greater amounts of alcohol to fill the same effect.

## What Is a Drink?

One standard drink is equal to



\*Depending on the type of alcohol and the recipe, one mixed drink can contain one to three or more standard drinks.