



Sue Ann Says: Don't Drink Alcohol When You're Pregnant. Period.

DON'T DRINK ALCOHOL WHEN YOU ARE PREGNANT! There, I said it as loudly as I could and hopefully they'll hear me all the way to China. And yet, it always amazes me when someone asks us if there is a safe amount a women can drink while she's pregnant. Here's me getting on the soap box, again...THERE IS NO KNOWN SAFE AMOUNT OF ALCOHOL TO DRINK WHILE PREGNANT.

In Wisconsin, nearly 68% of women of childbearing age drink alcohol, and almost 25% are frequent or binge drinkers (4 or more per occasion). Wisconsin reports having one of the highest rates of alcohol use amongst pregnant women in the country at close to 32 percent compared to the national average at 12 percent. This means 1 in 4 pregnant women in the state of Wisconsin drink alcohol during their pregnancy. When a pregnant woman drinks alcohol, her unborn baby drinks alcohol, too.

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Spectrum Disorders

You've probably heard of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS). It's one of the more widely-known results of prenatal alcohol exposure. Generally distinguishable in children by specific facial abnormalities and growth deficiencies, what many people don't realize is alcohol can affect a baby in ways we can't see. For one, research has shown prenatal exposure to alcohol is linked to children who experience social and emotional problems as they grow older. Some struggle in school due to learning disabilities while others require special counseling for their physical and emotional scars. Many of the cognitive and behavioral disorders separate from FAS are contained within Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD), an umbrella term encompassing the many different ways children can be affected by prenatal exposure to alcohol.

Costs for children exposed to alcohol during pregnancy go beyond the physical. Although it is difficult to estimate, across the nation the average total lifetime cost for a child with FAS is projected between one and 5 million dollars. When you consider prenatal alcohol exposure is the leading preventable cause of mental retardation in the U.S., the costs both physically and financially are mind-boggling.

Getting Effective Help for Drinking During Pregnancy

If a woman is pregnant, or wants to become pregnant, she should not drink alcohol. Even if she is pregnant and has already consumed alcohol, it is important to stop drinking for the rest of her pregnancy. Stopping can still reduce the chances that her child might be affected by alcohol.

There is an attitude that the negative effects of drinking during pregnancy are common knowledge. While many women are aware of the risks, many still do not know all the dangers. Many times this judgmental attitude creates a stigma around the issue. The result is many women feel ashamed to admit they have drunk during pregnancy, whether it's because they have a problem with alcohol use or did not know alcohol could be harmful to their child. It is important for all women to understand ceasing drinking can be difficult even when one knows they are pregnant and that help is available.

Staff at the Wisconsin Women's Health Foundation has been specially certified from UW-Madison's Continuing Studies on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders. They work with the My Baby & Me program which offers special education, training, and support to public health nurses who provide prenatal coordination services (PNCC). In addition, the nurses receive on-going support and assistance from their local Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse (AODA) providers.

My Baby & Me uses an approach to health promotion where care providers and clients work together to accomplish the client's health goals. The nurses educate women on the risks of alcohol use to their baby, discuss alternatives to drinking during pregnancy and most importantly, create a trustful, nonjudgmental relationship with clients so they feel more comfortable discussing the difficult issues surrounding drinking during pregnancy.

If you would like more information on alcohol and pregnancy, talk to your doctor or PNCC, or contact:

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)

Check your local phone book for listings in your area

<http://www.aa.org>

Wisconsin Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders Treatment Outreach Project

1-800-752-3157

<http://www.Pregnancyandalcohol.org>

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

5635 Fishers Lane

Bethesda, MD 20892-9304

(301) 443-3860

<http://www.niaaa.nih.gov>

National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

900 17th Street, NW, Suite 910

Washington, DC 20006

(800) 66-NOFAS

<http://www.nofas.org>

WWHF continues to stress along with the U.S. Surgeon General that no amount or type of alcohol at any time during pregnancy has been proven safe and hopes to decrease the number of FASD cases by increasing the number of women who do not drink while pregnant. Pass it on.

Because it all begins with a healthy woman.



Sue Ann Thompson

Founder & President

Wisconsin Women's Health Foundation

The Wisconsin Women's Health Foundation (WWHF) is a statewide non-profit organization whose mission is to help Wisconsin women and their families reach their healthiest potential. WWHF provides programs and conducts forums that focus on education, prevention, early detection, and connecting individuals to resources; produces and distributes the most up-to-date health education and resource materials; and, awards grants and scholarships to women health

researchers and related community non-profits. To make a donation or to learn more, visit www.hf.org or call 1-800-448-5148.

Facts About FAS and FASD: What's the Difference?

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) - Consists of a pattern of neurological, behavioral and cognitive deficits that can interfere with growth, learning and socialization. FAS has four major components:

1. A characteristic pattern of facial abnormalities
2. Growth deficiencies, such as low birth weight
3. Brain damage, such as small skull at birth, structural defects and neurological signs including impaired fine motor skills, poor hand-eye coordination and tremors
4. Maternal alcohol use during pregnancy

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) - Umbrella term used to describe the range of effects that can occur in an individual whose mother drank alcohol during pregnancy.

These include:

- Fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS)
- Fetal alcohol effects (FAE)
- Alcohol-related neurodevelopmental disorder
- Alcohol-related birth defects

These effects may include physical, mental, behavioral, and learning disabilities with possible lifelong implications. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Resources)