

Alcohol and breastfeeding: a guide for mothers



**Australian
Breastfeeding
Association**

Not drinking any alcohol when pregnant or planning a pregnancy is important for your baby to be healthy and develop safely. *Choosing not to drink any* alcohol when you are breastfeeding is also safest for the health and development of your baby. Knowing the facts about alcohol and breastfeeding can help you make informed decisions about consuming alcohol during the time you are breastfeeding your baby.

How does alcohol get into my breastmilk?

Alcohol gets into your breastmilk from your blood, moving freely from the blood to the breastmilk (and back out again). There will be alcohol in your breastmilk 30 to 60 minutes after you start drinking.

How much alcohol gets into my breastmilk?

The amount of alcohol in your breastmilk is the same as the amount in your blood (your blood alcohol level).

A number of factors affect how much alcohol gets into your breastmilk, including:

- *The alcohol level of your drink.* The higher this is, the more alcohol gets into your breastmilk.
- *What and how much you eat* before and during alcohol consumption.
- *How much you weigh.* The less you weigh the longer it takes for alcohol to clear from your bloodstream.
- *How quickly you drink.* The more alcohol you drink in a period of time, the higher the alcohol level in your breastmilk.

Can I reduce the amount of alcohol in my breastmilk?

Time is the only way to reduce the amount of alcohol in your breastmilk. Once you stop drinking, the amount of alcohol in your blood drops and the amount in your breastmilk will too.

'Pumping and dumping' (expressing breastmilk and throwing it away) will not reduce the amount of alcohol in your breastmilk more quickly. You will still need to wait for your body to process the alcohol.

Will stout improve my milk supply?

No. You may have heard that dark beers like stout are good for your milk supply. In reality, the alcohol stops the milk flowing as freely. Milk stays in the breasts, giving the false impression that the breasts are making more milk.

How much can I drink?

Australian guidelines state that it is safest for breastfeeding women not to drink alcohol.

At the very least, avoid alcohol in the first month of your baby's life. Very young babies breastfeed often without any pattern. It is hard to predict when the next feed will be. Your baby could need their next feed while there is still alcohol in your breastmilk.

As babies get older their feeding patterns get more regular. You can often tell when their next feed will be. This makes it easier to plan any drinking. You may feel more confident that the next feed will contain little or no alcohol. However, sometimes babies don't always stick to their routine. Be aware that your baby may be a bit 'out of sorts' or 'not their usual self' and allow for this.

How can I have a drink and still breastfeed?

- If you decide to drink alcohol while you are breastfeeding your baby, plan ahead. Breastfeed your baby before you start. They will be unlikely to need to breastfeed again within the next couple of hours. This will extend the time between drinking alcohol and needing to breastfeed. In the next section, you will find more tips on how to manage breastfeeding without exposing your baby to alcohol.
- Choose low alcohol options.
- Eat before and while you are drinking. Having food in your stomach slows down the rate at which it takes in alcohol. Have water or other non-alcoholic drinks in between alcoholic drinks.

Planning ahead

- Express some milk ahead of your night out and store the expressed milk in the fridge, or express and freeze some milk beforehand.
- Your baby can have this milk if you miss a feed while drinking, or while you are waiting for the level of alcohol in your milk to drop.

- Arrange for someone who is not affected by alcohol to look after your baby.
- Don't sleep with your baby if you (or anyone else in the bed) are affected by alcohol.

What is the impact on my breastmilk supply?

Your milk flow may not be as strong as usual while there's still alcohol in your blood. It will come back to normal again once your body has processed all the alcohol.

Your baby may not sleep as well as usual. They may fall asleep quicker, but wake up sooner, instead of having a longer deep sleep.

What if I miss a breastfeed because of drinking?

If you miss a feed and your breasts are feeling very full, express some milk and throw it away. This will help with your comfort and will keep up your milk supply.

What if I drank more alcohol than I planned or the baby needs to feed sooner?

If just once, you have a little more alcohol than you had planned or if your baby needs to feed before you expect it, it is OK to breastfeed. It is important for the health of your baby not to do this regularly.

Key points

- Breastfeeding plays an important part in how your baby grows, both physically and mentally.
- Breastfeed before you have an alcoholic drink.
- Eat before and during the time you are drinking alcohol.
- Plan ahead, especially if you are going to drink and there is a chance you'll need to feed your baby before the alcohol has cleared your system.

What's a 'standard drink'?

One standard drink contains 10 g of alcohol, ie

- 100 mL of 13.5% wine, or
- 1 'stubby' (375 mL) of mid-strength beer, or
- 1 pre-mixed bottle (alcoholic seltzers 5%) (275 mL), or
- 30 mL of spirits.

How long does it take for all the alcohol to be out of my system?

As a general rule, it takes 2 hours for an average woman to get rid of the alcohol from 1 standard alcoholic drink. As a guide, double this for every additional drink (4 hours for 2 standard drinks, 6 hours for 3 standard drinks and so on). The Feed Safe app can help you work this out more accurately or you can use the table below.

To use this table follow these steps:

- Find the body weight closest to your current body weight down the left-hand column.
- Decide how many drinks you may have or have had from the top row.
- Read along the row where your weight appears and then down the column that equals the number of drinks.
- This is about the time, in hours and minutes, before there is no alcohol in your breastmilk.

Approximate time taken for alcohol to be cleared from breastmilk (hours: minutes)

Mother's weight	Number of standard drinks					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
kg						
55	1:55	3:51	5:46	7:42	9:38	11:33
57	1:53	3:46	5:40	7:33	9:26	11:20
59	1:51	3:42	5:33	7:25	9:16	11:07
61	1:48	3:38	5:27	7:16	9:05	10:55
64	1:47	3:34	5:22	7:08	8:56	10:43
66	1:45	3:30	5:15	7:01	8:46	10:32
68	1:43	3:27	5:10	6:54	8:37	10:21
70	1:42	3:23	5:05	6:46	8:28	10:10
73	1:40	3:20	5:00	6:40	8:20	10:00
75	1:38	3:16	4:55	6:33	8:12	9:50
77	1:36	3:13	4:50	6:27	8:03	9:40
79	1:35	3:10	4:45	6:20	7:55	9:31
82	1:33	3:07	4:41	6:15	7:48	9:22
84	1:32	3:04	4:36	6:08	7:41	9:13
86	1:31	3:02	4:32	6:03	7:34	9:05

Notes: Time is taken from the start of drinking. It is assumed that alcohol is cleared at a constant rate of 15 mg/dL and the height of the women is 162.56 centimetres. **Example 1:** A 59 kg woman has had 3 standard drinks, one after the other. It would take 5 hours and 33 minutes from when she started drinking for there to be no alcohol in her breastmilk. For a 70 kg woman drinking the same amount, it would take 5 hours 5 minutes. **Example 2:** An 84 kg woman has 2 standard drinks starting at 8:00 pm. There would be a zero level of alcohol in her breastmilk 3 hours and 4 minutes later (ie at 11:04 pm).

Source: Giglia & Binns 2006 (adapted from Ho et al 2001).



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Breastfeeding Helpline 1800 mum 2 mum

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The National Breastfeeding Helpline is supported
by funding from the Australian Government.

Contacts

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Resources

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