

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 and therefore 4 hours for 2 drinks, 6 hours for 3 drinks and so on.

The following table gives more accurate times for mothers, depending on their weight. To use this table follow these steps:

1. Find the body weight closest to your current body weight down the left hand column.
2. Decide how many drinks you might have or have had from the top row.
3. Read along the row where your weight appears and then down the column that equals the number of drinks.

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

Mother's Weight (kg)	Number of standard drinks					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
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

Note: 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 162.5 centimetres.

Example 1: For a 59 kg woman who 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: For an 84 kg woman drinking 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).

What if I often have 3 or more drinks a day?

Drinking 3 or more drinks a day can be harmful to your health and that of your baby. Be aware that:

- You may not be able to take care of your baby properly if you are affected by alcohol.
- Your baby may be slower to reach developmental milestones.
- Alcohol may decrease the flow of your milk and thus reduce your supply.

Key points

- Breastfeeding is important for your baby's physical growth and emotional and mental development.
- You can have up to 2 standard drinks, but not every day, once your baby is a month old.
- Breastfeed before you have alcohol.
- Eat before and while you are drinking.
- Plan ahead if you think you may occasionally have more than 2 standard drinks.
- It is better to give a breastfeed with a small amount of alcohol than to feed artificial baby milk.
- There are risks in feeding your baby artificial baby milk.

Resources:

Giglia, R. C. and C. W. Binns. 2006. Alcohol and lactation: a systematic review. *Nutrition and Dietetics* 63: 103–116.

National Health and Medical Research Council. 2009. *Australian guidelines to reduce health risks from drinking alcohol*. Canberra: National Health and Medical Research Council.

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Alcohol and breastfeeding: a guide for mothers



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For the health and safe development of their babies, many mothers avoid drinking alcohol while pregnant. However, once your baby is born, you may wish to enjoy a drink with a meal, when out with friends, or on some special occasion.

We do know that **not** drinking alcohol is safest. Knowing the facts about how alcohol affects breastfeeding will help you to decide how best to combine breastfeeding with drinking some alcohol.

The facts: alcohol and breastfeeding

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). Alcohol will be in your breastmilk 30–60 minutes after you start drinking.

How much alcohol gets into my breastmilk?

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

- the strength and amount of alcohol in your drink
- what and how much you've eaten
- how much you weigh
- how quickly you are drinking.

It is important to know that the amount of alcohol in your blood is the amount of alcohol in your milk.

Can I reduce the amount of alcohol in my breastmilk?

Once you stop drinking, and the amount of alcohol in your blood drops, the amount in your milk will too.

'Pumping and dumping' (expressing breastmilk and throwing it away) will not reduce the amount of alcohol in your breastmilk.

Only time will reduce the amount of alcohol in your breastmilk.

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 (alcopop 5%) (275 mL), or
- 30 mL of spirits.

How much can I drink?

Australian guidelines for all women (except when pregnant) recommend no more than two standard drinks per day.

It is best to avoid alcohol in the first month after the birth, until breastfeeding is going well and there is some sort of pattern to your baby's feeding.

When your baby is very young, life can be busy. Your baby may have frequent breastfeeds without any pattern. You may not be able to tell when the next feed will be so you need to be aware that your baby could need another feed while there is still alcohol in your milk.

As babies get older they fall into a more regular feeding pattern. You can often tell when their next feed will be. This makes it easier to enjoy a drink knowing that the next feed will contain little or no alcohol. However, sometimes babies don't always stick to their routine. Be aware if your baby is 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 have 1 or 2 standard drinks a day, then time the drinks to have the least effect on your baby.

- Breastfeed your baby before you drink. You can then enjoy a drink knowing you'll be unlikely to need to feed again within the next couple of hours.
- Eat before and while drinking.
- One way to reduce the amount of alcohol you drink is to alternate alcoholic with non-alcoholic drinks.

What if I'm planning a bigger night out than usual or had more to drink than I had planned?

- **Breastmilk with a small amount of alcohol is still better for your baby than artificial baby milk.**
- Express some milk ahead of your night out. The baby can have this milk if you miss a feed while drinking, or while you are waiting for the amount of alcohol in your milk to drop.
- If you know that sometimes you drink more than you plan to, you can express and freeze some milk just in case.
- If you miss a feed while you are drinking alcohol, and your breasts are feeling uncomfortable, express some milk and throw it away. This will help with your comfort and will maintain your milk supply.
- You may find that your milk flow is not as strong as usual while there's still alcohol in your blood. Your milk flow will come back to normal again once your body has cleared the alcohol.
- Your baby may not sleep as well as usual. He might fall asleep quicker, but wake up sooner, instead of having a deep sleep lasting for a longer time.
- Arrange for someone who isn't 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.

Will stout improve my milk supply?

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