

# THINKING ABOUT PREGNANCY?

a booklet to reflect on alcohol  
use before you are pregnant



2022

# WHY IS THINKING ABOUT ALCOHOL IMPORTANT?

Many people are unaware that drinking any amount can impact health and wellness. Being aware of these risks is helpful when making choices about your drinking. This booklet is offered as a tool for people who are planning a pregnancy to make decisions about alcohol.

While alcohol may be used for enjoyment or to cope with stressors, it can also contribute to challenges in peoples' lives.

Alcohol can affect people's mental health and increase anxiety and depression. Alcohol is also linked to cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, diabetes, and liver disease.

Alcohol can lead to incidents of violence and risky behaviour, such as drunk driving, and can cause physical and emotional harms.

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Why might thinking about alcohol be important for you?

## What is a standard drink?



43 ml (1.5 oz) shot of 40% hard liquor



142 ml (5oz) glass of 12% wine



341 ml (12 oz) bottle of 5% alcohol beer, cider, or cooler



Knowing what a standard drink size is can help you assess your level of use as you begin pregnancy planning.

If you are interested in assessing your level of use with a tracking tool, the [Saying When](#) app may be useful to you, and can link your alcohol use with your goals and the strategies you identify throughout this booklet.

# ALCOHOL AND PREGNANCY

**Thinking about alcohol before you are pregnant is important.**

Alcohol can impact your health while you're trying to conceive, and can have effects on yours and your baby's health before you know you're pregnant. Reflecting on your alcohol use can be an important part of your health and pregnancy planning.

**For those planning a pregnancy:**

- Drinking can affect ovulation, cause irregular periods, alter hormones, sperm function, and sperm count.
- Heavy drinking may also lead to sexual dysfunction, making it difficult to conceive.

**Involving partners in pregnancy planning**

It can be easier to stop or reduce your drinking when you're doing it with your partner(s). Making changes together can improve your relationship, physical health, mental wellbeing, and communication.



**What about during pregnancy?**

Prenatal alcohol exposure can lead to:

- Miscarriage
- Stillbirth
- Low birth weight
- Premature birth
- Physical and neurodevelopmental impacts
- Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), a disability and term referring to the lifelong brain- and body-related impacts of prenatal alcohol exposure.

Individuals with FASD may have some degree of challenges with their daily living and need support with their motor skills, physical health, learning, memory, attention, communication, emotional regulation, and social skills.

**Since there is no guaranteed safe amount, no alcohol when you are pregnant, or trying to become pregnant, is safest.**

# UNDERSTANDING BENEFITS AND HARMS

There are many reasons why people choose to drink - it can be a fun way to connect with others, help reduce stress, and help us cope with things in our day-to-day lives. In many cultures, alcohol is embedded in social interactions, creating expectations for us to drink. Reflecting on the role of alcohol in your own life can help identify some of the benefits and drawbacks.

## Possible benefits to drinking:

- Feels good
- Helps with relaxation
- Reduces stress
- Social lubricant
- Can feel helpful when dealing with violence or trauma, or living in unsafe environments

## Possible drawbacks to drinking:

- Can affect maternal and fetal health
- Longer-term health effects
- Stigma and judgement
- It is expensive
- May negatively affect relationships
- Hangovers

What do you like about drinking?

Is there anything you don't like about drinking?

# THE PROCESS OF CHANGE

When finding alternatives to alcohol, you may be looking for other options for a beverage, a stress relief tool, a social activity, and more.

Ideas for your toolbox

- Do what you enjoy!
  - Go for a walk, bike ride, stretch, do yoga, art projects, read, talk to a friend, take part in cultural activities/events, etc.
- Try something new
- Check if non-alcoholic drinks like sparkling water are available when planning an event.
- Learn about dry events happening where you live.

What else is in your toolbox?

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It can be helpful to make a plan and take small steps to help you achieve your goals. This may feel strange at first, but that's normal. When one thing isn't working, try something else from your toolbox.

If you wanted to turn down a drink, how would you?

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# WHO IS BY YOUR SIDE?

Change is hard. Using the wheel below, think about who is in your circle of support.

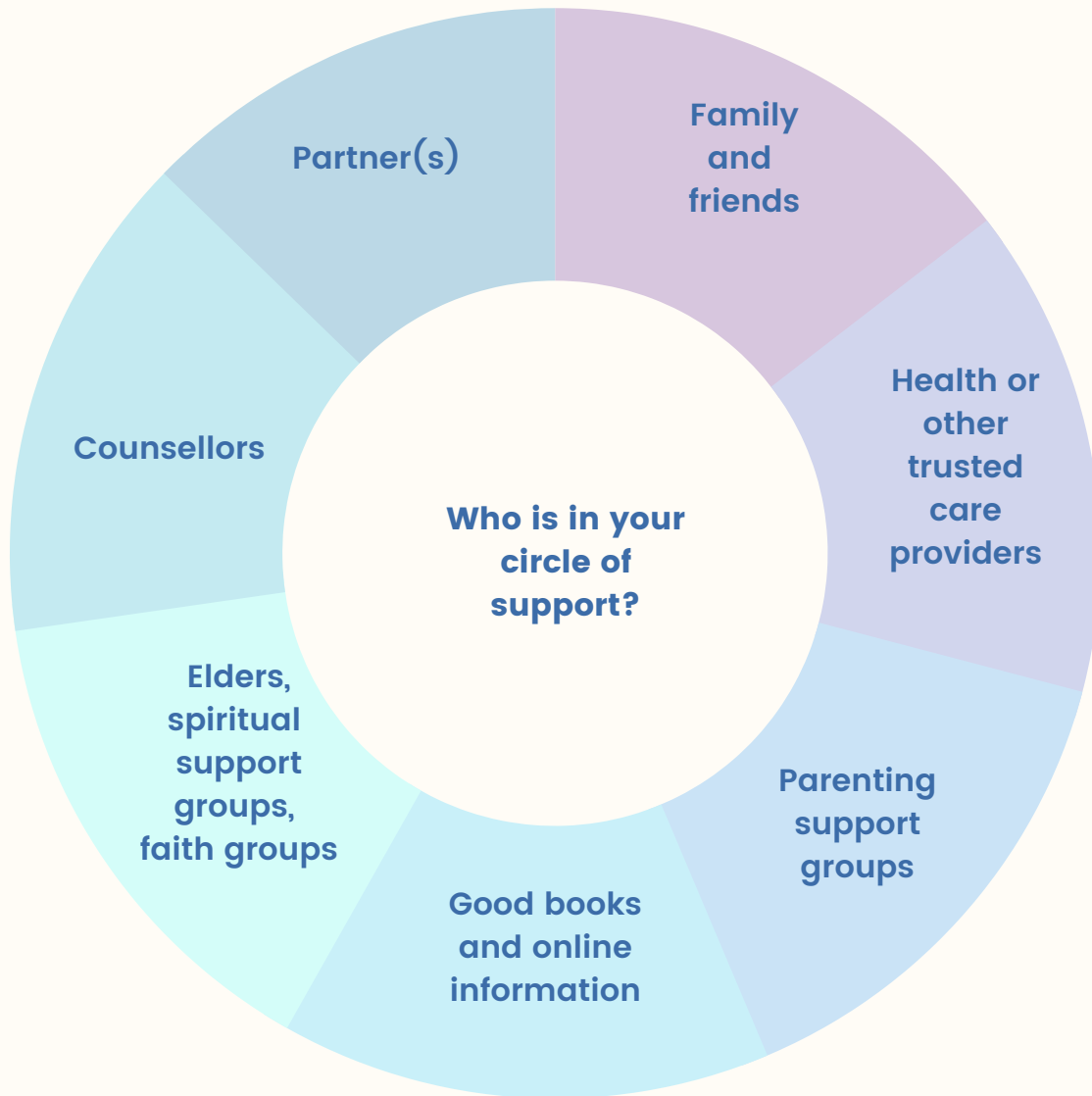


Image adapted from Centre of Excellence for Women's Health and the Sex, Gender & Cannabis Hub.

Who are the people who can help you achieve your goals? How do they support you? Are there other supports you might find helpful?

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## A FINAL NOTE

Alcohol and pregnancy are not neutral topics. There are stigmas and cultural norms attached to them, creating barriers to care for women and transgender, nonbinary, and gender diverse individuals. Some people experience additional stigma linked to the historic and ongoing effects of colonialism and racism.

Despite it all, we believe in peoples' resiliency and power to make informed decisions. We hope this booklet can help you reflect on your alcohol use, and identify tools and supports when planning a pregnancy.



### Need more support?

Talk to trusted care providers.

Call or visit the website for your local, provincial, or territorial health services for local resources.

Seek out trauma-informed and anti-oppressive therapists in your area. Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour may benefit from seeing a therapist that is also a person of colour.

Read more about how alcohol and other factors impact health and wellness.

# FURTHER RESOURCES

## Information about alcohol and pregnancy:

### Think FASD

<https://www.thinkfasd.ca/>

- Information about ways to prevent FASD

### The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada

<https://www.pregnancyinfo.ca/>

### Centre of Excellence for Women's Health

<https://cewh.ca/>

### LGBTQIA2S Pregnancy and Birth Resources

<https://www.bcmidwives.com/Resources.html>



## Mental health and substance use support:

### Wellness Together

<https://www.wellnesstogether.ca/en-CA>

- Website and free phone counselling services.

## Support for gender-based violence:

### Shelter Safe

<https://sheltersafe.ca/get-help>

- List of local shelters and helplines with a quick exit button.



## For more information:

### Healing in Colour Directory

<https://www.healingincolour.com/directory>

- People of Colour therapists committed to anti-racist approaches.

### Native Youth Sexual Health Network Peer-Support Guide

<https://www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com/peersupportmanual>

- Manual for Indigiqueer, Two-Spirit, LGBTQ+, and Gender Non-Conforming Indigenous care.



# MOCKTAIL RECIPES

## Mojito

### Ingredients

- 2 tbsp lime juice
- 10–15 fresh mint leaves
- 2 tbsp honey simple syrup
- Sparkling water
- Ice

### Directions

1. Muddle the mint leaves and lime juice together in a glass. Muddling = crushing the mint leaves and mashing into the lime juice to release flavours and oils.
2. Add the honey simple syrup.
3. Add the sparkling water.
4. Garnish with lime slices, a sprig of mint, and/or fresh fruit.

Recipe from Sustainable Cooks



## Rosemary Grapefruit Sparkle

### Ingredients

- 1/4 cup rosemary leaves
- 1/2 cup boiling water
- 1 tbsp honey
- 1 cup grapefruit juice
- 8oz sparkling water

### Directions

1. Pour boiling water over rosemary leaves in heatproof container. Let steep for 15–20 minutes.
2. Strain out leaves and stir in honey until dissolved. Cool in fridge.
3. Combine rosemary-honey mixture with grapefruit juice.
4. Pour into glasses with ice and add sparkling water.

Recipe from Experience Life



## Lavender Lemonade

### Ingredients

- 6 cups water
- 1/2 cup honey
- 5 tbsp dried lavender
- 1 cup lemon juice

### Directions

1. Boil honey and water over medium-high heat.
2. Gently crush the lavender.
3. Add lavender to honey-water mixture.
4. Remove from heat. Steep for 2 hours and cool in fridge.
5. Strain and stir in lemon juice.
6. Pour over ice.

Recipe from Town & Country



For more mocktail recipes, visit <https://canfasd.ca/mocktails/>



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