

Alcohol Use and Breastfeeding

Many breastfeeding mothers have questions about consuming alcohol.

Is it okay to drink alcohol while breastfeeding?

It is difficult to give a definitive answer regarding the safety of drinking alcohol while breastfeeding because alcohol is a drug with potential negative side effects.

The American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Drugs considers alcohol consumption compatible with breastfeeding, stating that an occasional drink or regular light drinking (one or fewer drinks per day) has not been found to be harmful to a nursing baby. **Moderation appears to be the key factor.**

Does alcohol pass into the breast milk?

Yes. Alcohol passes freely in and out of your milk. Milk levels are found to peak 30 – 60 minutes after drinking alcohol on an empty stomach, or 60 – 90 minutes if you drink after eating food. It takes a 120-pound woman about 2-3 hours to eliminate one serving of beer or wine from her milk. The more alcohol you consume, the longer it takes for your body to reabsorb the alcohol from your breastmilk and filter it out of your body. If you have a single drink, it may be wise to nurse right before consuming the drink. By your baby's next feeding, the alcohol should be out of your milk.

How does alcohol in breastmilk impact babies?

Alcohol is a central nervous system depressant. One study found that babies of mothers who consistently drank moderate to heavy amounts of alcohol (two or more drinks per day) scored slightly lower on motor development at one year of age. Babies of mothers who abuse alcohol regularly can fail to gain weight at a normal rate. One reason for this may be that babies have been shown to drink smaller amounts from the breast shortly after their mothers consume alcohol.

What about a special occasion, like a wedding or birthday celebration?

If you find that you are going to have numerous drinks in a short time period, it would be wise to feed your baby previously pumped milk during this time period. While you are waiting for the alcohol to clear out of your milk, you may want to "pump and dump" (pump and discard your milk) to avoid very full breasts and to maintain your milk supply.

A very conservative approach would be to "pump and dump" the number of drinks you have consumed x two hours. For example: if you have 5 drinks between 6 and 10 pm, "pump and dump" for the next 10 hours, or until 8 am. **A more relaxed approach** would be to resume nursing once you are no longer feeling the effects of the alcohol as by then the amount in your milk should be quite low. In the meantime, you may need to "pump and dump" to avoid uncomfortable engorgement.

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MilkWorks



Community
Breastfeeding
Center

5930 S. 58th Street
(in the Trade Center)
Lincoln, NE 68516
(402) 423-6402

10818 Elm Street
Rockbrook Village
Omaha, NE 68144
(402) 502-0617

For additional
information:
www.milkworks.org