

Alcohol and Breastfeeding

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The Breastfeeding Network factsheets will be reviewed on an ongoing basis, usually within three years or sooner where major clinical updates or evidence are published. No responsibility can be taken by the Breastfeeding Network or contributing authors for the way in which the information is used.

If you have any questions about this information, you can contact the Drugs in Breastmilk team through their [Facebook page](#) or on druginformation@breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk.

You can have occasional, small amounts of alcohol but should not drink regularly or heavily (e.g. binge drinking) without considering how to limit your baby's exposure.
If you drink any alcohol DO NOT bed share with your baby or fall asleep in the sofa/chair.
If you do drink heavily, your baby should be cared for by an adult who has not had any alcohol.
It is not necessary to express breastmilk to clear it of alcohol.

- Never share a bed or sofa with your baby if you have drunk any alcohol. Doing this has an increased association with sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). You can find more information on the [BASIS website](#).
- Alcohol passes freely into breastmilk. Levels of alcohol in your breastmilk reach approximately the same levels as your blood. Your blood alcohol levels have to reach around 300mg/100ml (or 0.3%) before causing mild sedation in your baby. This compares with a level of 80mg/100ml (0.08%) needed to fail the police blood test in England, Wales and N. Ireland; or 50mg/100ml (0.05%) Scotland.
- Peak alcohol levels in your milk appear after 30-90 minutes but this does not mean that social drinking of small amounts of alcohol mean that you cannot breastfeed as normal.
- If you want to reduce your baby's exposure to alcohol, you could avoid breastfeeding for 2-3 hours after drinking.
- Excess levels of alcohol in your milk may lead to drowsiness, deep sleep, weakness and decreased growth in your infant. Reduction of let-down has been reported with heavy drinking. Alcohol may reduce your baby's sucking time at the breast but not the volume of milk consumed.
- It is not necessary to express breastmilk to clear it of alcohol; as your blood levels fall, the level of alcohol in your breastmilk will decrease.
- Binge drinking (more than 6 units of alcohol in one period), may make you less aware of your baby's needs. If you have drunk enough alcohol to make you feel disorientated or cause vomiting you should not be caring for your baby without supervision from a sober adult. You should ideally express for comfort and to maintain your supply – although this may be the last thing on your mind!
- Chronic consumption of alcohol is more likely to cause harm than occasional social drinking.

To talk to a mum who knows about breastfeeding call the National Breastfeeding Helpline 0300 100 0212

Calls to 0300 numbers cost no more than calls to UK numbers starting 01 and 02 and will be part of any inclusive minutes that apply to your provider and call package.

Sleep Safety

It is vital that ANYONE who has been drinking alcohol should never let themselves be in a situation where they might fall asleep with a baby; on a bed, chair or settee. The place of sleep is a bigger risk than the alcohol levels in your breastmilk, unless your consumption has been very high. For more information, see the [BASIS website](#).

Drinking alcohol reduces your ability to be aware of your baby's needs, whether you are breastfeeding or not. It is safest to ask someone else to care for your baby if you have drunk more a small amount of alcohol.

Other websites

NHS Breastfeeding and drinking alcohol - Your pregnancy and baby guide
www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/breastfeeding-alcohol/

Guidelines from the NHS

- Anything you eat or drink while you're breastfeeding can find its way into your breast milk, and that includes alcohol.
- If you regularly drink as much as 14 units per week, it's best to spread your drinking evenly over 3 or more days.
- If you wish to cut down the amount you drink, a good way to help achieve this is to have several drink-free days each week.
- Fourteen units is equivalent to: 6 pints of average-strength beer, 10 small glasses of low-strength wine

Use Alcohol Change's alcohol calculator to check your units: <https://alcoholchange.org.uk/alcohol-facts/interactive-tools/unit-calculator>