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Alcohol and Pregnancy

Drinking alcohol, whether it is a wine-cooler, beer, wine, distilled spirits or liquor, can adversely affect the baby at anytime during a pregnancy. In fact, any amount of alcohol is considered unsafe, especially since it is not known just how much it takes to cause harm. (Alcohol is usually “denatured” in cooking.)

As soon as a pregnant woman drinks alcohol it enters her bloodstream and passes rapidly via the placenta to the baby. Mother and baby then share the same blood levels of alcohol. An adult liver can effectively break down alcohol, however a baby’s liver is not mature enough to metabolize the alcohol so the affect can be much greater.

Early in pregnancy, alcohol can cause miscarriages or multi organ damage to the baby (Fetal alcohol syndrome), which becomes evident after birth. Later exposure can cause stillbirths, preterm delivery, growth restriction (low birth weight), low IQ, learning disabilities such as deficits in reading, spelling and arithmetic, behavioral problems such as hyperactivity, aggression, delinquency, depression, anxiety and withdrawal. Alcohol abuse during pregnancy is the known leading cause of mental retardation and it is entirely preventable. The broad range of abnormalities due to alcohol exposure is termed FASD – Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.

One in every 100 infants has an alcohol related neurodevelopmental disorder. Of those, FAS (Fetal Alcohol Syndrome) and stillbirth are the most serious effects. Of every 1,000 babies in the US, 1.9 will have FAS. This is usually associated with moderate or binge drinking (4 drinks in a row), but may occur at much lower consumption levels. These babies have facial deformities, growth problems and central nervous system problems including mental retardation.

Along with the Center for Disease Control (CDC) the surgeon general, The Department of Health and Human Services, and The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, your providers recommend abstaining from alcohol when planning a pregnancy and during the pregnancy. We know that 12% of women admit to using alcohol in pregnancy and 2% admit to binge drinking. We will be happy to help you get treatment if it is difficult to stop on your own.

An easy self-screening tool for alcohol misuse is the T-ACE test. Each answer “yes” scores 1 point. A score of 2 points or more indicates misuse of alcohol and should prompt you to seek help.

- How many drinks does it take for you to feel high? (TOLERANCE to alcohol – if more than 2 drinks – score 2 points)
- Do you feel ANNOYED by people complaining about your drinking?
- Have you ever felt the need to CUT DOWN on your drinking?
- Have you ever had a drink first thing in the morning? (EYE-OPENER)

What's your score ?