

# Learn more about Alcohol and Breastfeeding



## Key

1. Breastfeeding is very common and is a great, economical way to feed your baby.
2. If you drink alcohol, there **will** be alcohol in your breast milk after you drink.
3. It is safest to avoid alcohol for the first **3 months** of your baby's life. This gives your baby's liver time to develop.
4. When your baby is older than 3 months, follow ***Canada's Low Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines*** if you choose to drink alcohol.
5. Breastfeed just **before you drink alcohol**, or pump before drinking so the alcohol has time to leave your system before the next feed.



**It is safest to avoid alcohol for the first 3 months after birth.**

If you consume alcohol, there will be alcohol in your breast milk after you drink. Alcohol has a greater effect on babies younger than **3 months** because their livers are less developed, and therefore, less able to filter alcohol.

Young babies breastfeed often and without pattern. This makes it difficult to be sure there is no alcohol in your breast milk when your baby wants to feed.



## The amount of alcohol in your blood is the amount of alcohol in your milk.

Alcohol gets in to your breast milk from your blood. It moves freely from blood to breast milk and back out again.

Alcohol shows up in your breast milk almost right away, and is at the highest levels **30-60 minutes** after you start drinking.

The amount of alcohol that gets into your breast milk depends on several things, including:

- The amount of alcohol in your drink
- What/how much you've eaten
- How much you weigh
- How quickly you are drinking



## Only time reduces the amount of alcohol in your breast milk.

As the amount of alcohol in your blood starts to drop, the amount in your breast milk will drop too. As long as there is alcohol in your blood, there is alcohol in your breast milk.

As a general rule, it takes approximately **2-3 hours** for the alcohol from **one drink** to leave breast milk. It takes **4-6 hours** for **2 drinks**, **6-9 hours** for **3 drinks**, and so on.

"Pumping and dumping" - **pumping** breast milk and throwing it away - does **NOT** reduce the amount of alcohol in your breast milk. Alcohol is not "stored" in your milk, just as it isn't stored in your blood.

As long as there is alcohol in your system, there will be alcohol in the new milk your body makes to replace the milk you pumped out. Once the alcohol has passed through your system, it is gone from your milk, too.

## Canada's Low Risk Drinking Guidelines for Breastfeeding

If you are drinking alcohol while breastfeeding, there will be alcohol in your breast milk. If you plan to drink alcohol, there are things you can do to make sure the alcohol doesn't reach your baby. For example, you can breastfeed right before you drink alcohol, so the alcohol has time to leave your breast milk before your baby's next feed. Talk to your health care provider about how you can breastfeed safely if/when drinking alcohol.



If you plan to drink alcohol, there are things you can do to make sure the alcohol doesn't reach your baby.

## Follow Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines:

For people who are breastfeeding, it is safest to consume **no more than 1 drink per day**. Alcohol may impair your judgement and ability to safely care for your baby.

If you have 1 or 2 standard drinks in a day:

- Breastfeed your baby immediately before you drink. This allows time for the alcohol to leave your breast milk before the next feeding.
- Eat before and while drinking. This will help reduce the amount of alcohol you drink.
- Consider your age, weight and health problems that might suggest lower limits.
- Pick non-drinking days each week. This will help you avoid developing a drinking habit.

**Be aware that drinking 3 or more drinks a day can be harmful to your health and the health of your baby.**

- Drinking more alcohol than recommended can decrease the amount of breast milk you produce and shorten the length of time you are able to breastfeed.
- Your baby may be slower to reach developmental milestones.



### Low-Risk Drinking Guidelines

Low-Risk Drinking Guidelines recommend a person consume a maximum of:

**0-2 drinks a day, up to 10 drinks a week**

HOWEVER, if you are breastfeeding, we strongly recommend discussing these amounts with your Doctor, NP, or Lactation consultant, who can provide personalized guidelines. Once in a while, you might have an extra drink, but it's important to stay within the recommended weekly limits.



**Beer (or any other type of alcohol) will not improve your milk supply.**

Research has shown that any type of alcohol does not increase or benefit breast milk supply. In fact, it can actually decrease your milk supply.



## If you have more to drink than originally planned...

- Arrange for someone who hasn't been drinking alcohol to look after your baby.
- Don't sleep with your baby in a bed if you (or anyone else), have been drinking alcohol.
- If you know that sometimes you may drink more than originally planned, you can pump some breast milk ahead of time, just in case. Your baby can have this milk if you miss a feeding while drinking, or while you are waiting sufficient time for alcohol to leave your milk.
- If your breasts are uncomfortable because you missed a feeding, pump some milk and throw it away. This will help you feel more comfortable and help maintain your milk supply.



### For more information or support...

For more information on breastfeeding while consuming alcohol, or if you need some support, talk to a health care provider. This may be your family doctor, pediatrician or a nurse. You can also visit your local family resource centre.

To learn more about resources available specifically in each Atlantic province, [visit www.fasdNL.ca/resources](http://www.fasdNL.ca/resources).

