

Talking about Alcohol and Pregnancy

Information for Healthcare Providers

FASD is a leading cause of acquired developmental disability in Canada and affects approximately 96,000 people in Atlantic Canada. FASD impacts individuals in complex ways across the lifespan and occurs in all societies that consume alcohol and across all socioeconomic levels.

Blame, shame, and stigma associated with FASD can result in conversations about alcohol and pregnancy being missed. People may consume alcohol during pregnancy for many reasons, such as a coping mechanism, they don't know they are pregnant or because of misinformation around alcohol use and pregnancy.

Healthcare providers play an important role in supporting FASD prevention. fasdNL recommends open and supportive approaches to conversations about alcohol with everyone, but especially with pregnant people and their partners.

Brief Interventions and Ideas for Discussions About Alcohol

Regular discussions about alcohol and substance use can normalize the use of substances as part of our lives, such as how it connects to coping. Think about how to introduce the topic of substances like alcohol in regular health care visits, not just when people are pregnant. For example, if someone is having trouble sleeping, consider discussing how substances, like alcohol, can affect sleep and overall wellness.

Topics where alcohol conversations could be introduced may include:



Language Matters

Be mindful and avoid wording that can be **scary**, **confrontational**, or **increases the power dynamics** between health care provider and patient. Try not to use blaming, assumptive language and instead opt for strengths-based/empowering language.

Suggested Questions & Conversation Starters

Avoid Saying



“You’re not drinking alcohol during your pregnancy, are you?”



“Any amount of alcohol is harmful for the baby.”



“I think you should....”



“Drinking during pregnancy is absolutely unacceptable, so I hope you aren’t drinking.”



“Are you taking anything or doing anything that could harm your baby?”

Instead Try



“I ask all my patients questions about alcohol (substance use) because it’s important for our overall health. Would it be alright for me to do this now?”



“Many people have questions about drinking alcohol during pregnancy. Can I answer any questions you may have?”



“Can you please tell me a bit about your alcohol use before and during pregnancy?”



“I appreciate that you’re open to talking with me about alcohol use.”

These responses could lead to someone not discussing their alcohol use or not being completely truthful out of fear or shame, which could cause further harm to themselves or a pregnancy.

These responses could allow someone to be open about their alcohol use in a manner that empowers the patient and removes blame from the conversation, and may lead to preventative care.



For additional resources that can be used in digital or print format, scan the QR code!