

Drinking Alcohol while Breastfeeding

Desk Reference for Health Care Providers (HCP)

This desk reference provides information for HCP about reducing any possible negative effects of alcohol while continuing to support breastfeeding. While the harmful effects of alcohol during pregnancy are well established, the consequences of alcohol intake during lactation have been far less examined.

Breastfeeding is the optimal method of infant nutrition. The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends exclusive breastfeeding from birth to six months of age and continued breastfeeding, with appropriate complementary foods, for up to two years or beyond.



FACTS:

- In Canada in 2003-2010, about 10% of pregnant and 20% of breastfeeding women consumed alcohol.
- Alcohol enters breast milk by passive diffusion and levels closely resemble those in maternal blood within 30 to 60 minutes of ingestion.
- The amount of alcohol presented to nursing infants through breast milk is approximately 5-6% of the weight-adjusted maternal dose.
- The blood alcohol concentration of an infant exposed to alcohol via breast milk varies based on a number of factors (e.g. the amount of alcohol consumed by the mother and the weight of the infant).
- Newborns metabolize alcohol at approximately half the rate of adults.
- Recent research indicates that alcohol exposure via breast milk can:
 - Inhibit lactation.
 - Have a negative effect on infant motor development.
 - Disrupt the infant's sleep-wake pattern.
 - Reduce the amount of breast milk an infant will consume.
 - Increase risk of hypoglycemia.
- Mothers who consume alcohol while breastfeeding risk breastfeeding for a shorter duration. In addition, frequent or heavy drinking can impair the mother's judgment and functioning.

CLINICAL PRACTICE GUIDELINE

According to the SOGC CLINICAL PRACTICE GUIDELINE:

- HCP should create a safe environment for women to report and discuss alcohol consumption. Brief interventions are effective and should be provided by HCP for women with at-risk drinking (refer to www.sbir-diba.ca).

What to Tell Women:

- Occasional drinking does not warrant discontinuing breastfeeding, as the importance of breastfeeding is extensive and well recognized.
- Limit alcohol intake, particularly when breastfeeding newborns (first 3 months) because of their rapidly developing central nervous system and underdeveloped ability to metabolize alcohol.
- Follow Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines as occasional drinking while breastfeeding has not been convincingly shown to adversely affect nursing infants.
- Avoid heavy alcohol consumption or binge drinking while breastfeeding.
- After drinking alcohol, wait a certain amount of time before breastfeeding. Refer to attached table for details. Express breast milk to relieve any discomfort of engorgement and to help maintain milk supply.

Table - Time from beginning of drinking until clearance of alcohol from breast milk for women of various body weights: Assuming alcohol metabolism is constant at 15mg/dL and woman is of average height (1.62 m or 5'4")

Mother's Weight KG (lbs)	No. Of Drinks* (Hours : Minutes)											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
40.8 (90)	2:50	5:40	8:30	11:20	14:10	17:00	19:51	22:41				
43.1 (95)	2:46	5:32	8:19	11:05	13:52	16:38	19:25	22:11				
45.4 (100)	2:42	5:25	8:08	10:51	13:34	16:17	19:00	21:43				
47.6 (105)	2:39	5:19	7:58	10:38	13:18	15:57	18:37	21:16	23:56			
49.9 (110)	2:36	5:12	7:49	10:25	13:01	15:38	18:14	20:50	23:27			
52.2 (115)	2:33	5:06	7:39	10:12	12:46	15:19	17:52	20:25	22:59			
54.4 (120)	2:30	5:00	7:30	10:00	12:31	15:01	17:31	20:01	22:32			
56.7 (125)	2:27	4:54	7:22	9:49	12:16	14:44	17:11	19:38	22:06			
59.0 (130)	2:24	4:49	7:13	9:38	12:03	14:27	16:52	19:16	21:41			
61.2 (135)	2:21	4:43	7:05	9:27	11:49	14:11	16:33	18:55	21:17	23:39		
63.5 (140)	2:19	4:38	6:58	9:17	11:37	13:56	16:15	18:35	20:54	23:14		
65.8 (145)	2:16	4:33	6:50	9:07	11:24	13:41	15:58	18:15	20:32	22:49		
68.0 (150)	2:14	4:29	6:43	8:58	11:12	13:27	15:41	17:56	20:10	22:25		
70.3 (155)	2:12	4:24	6:36	8:48	11:01	13:13	15:25	17:37	19:49	22:02		
72.6 (160)	2:10	4:20	6:30	8:40	10:50	13:00	15:10	17:20	19:30	21:40	23:50	
74.8 (165)	2:07	4:15	6:23	8:31	10:39	12:47	14:54	17:02	19:10	21:18	23:50	
77.1 (170)	2:05	4:11	6:17	8:23	10:28	12:34	14:40	16:46	18:51	20:57	23:03	
79.3 (175)	2:03	4:07	6:11	8:14	10:18	12:22	14:26	16:29	18:33	20:37	22:40	
81.6 (180)	2:01	4:03	6:05	8:07	10:08	12:10	14:12	16:14	18:15	20:17	22:19	
83.9 (185)	1:59	3:59	5:59	7:59	9:59	11:59	13:59	15:59	17:58	19:58	21:58	23:58
86.2 (190)	1:58	3:56	5:54	7:52	9:50	11:48	13:46	15:44	17:42	19:40	21:38	23:36
88.5 (195)	1:56	3:52	5:48	7:44	9:41	11:37	13:33	15:29	17:26	19:22	21:18	23:14
90.7 (200)	1:54	3:49	5:43	7:38	9:32	11:27	13:21	15:16	17:10	19:05	20:59	22:54
93.0 (205)	1:52	3:45	5:38	7:31	9:24	11:17	13:09	15:02	16:55	18:48	20:41	22:34
95.3 (210)	1:51	3:42	5:33	7:24	9:16	11:07	12:58	14:49	16:41	18:32	20:23	22:14

*1 drink = 340 g (12 oz) of 5% beer, or 141.75 g (5 oz) of 11% wine, or 42.53 g (1.5 oz) of 40% liquor.

Example no. 1: For a 40.8-kg (90-lb) woman who consumed three drinks in 1 hour, it would take 8 hours, 30 minutes for there to be no alcohol in her breast milk, but for a 95.3-kg (210-lb) woman drinking the same amount, it would take 5 hours, 33 minutes.

Example no. 2: For a 63.5-kg (140-lb) woman drinking four beers starting at 8:00 pm, it would take 9 hours, 17 minutes for there to be no alcohol in her breast milk (ie, until 5:17 am).

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RESOURCES FOR HCP:

Alcohol Screening, Brief Intervention & Referral, Helping patients reduce alcohol-related risks www.sbir-diba.ca

Guidelines for Healthcare Providers to Promote Low-Risk Drinking Among Patients www.ccsa.ca/Resource%20Library/2012-Guidelines-For-Healthcare-Providers-to-Promote-Low-Risk-Drinking-Among-Patients-en.pdf

ABM Clinical Protocol #21: Guidelines for Breastfeeding and Substance Use or Substance Use Disorder, Revised 2015 [www.bfmed.org/Media/Files/Protocols/Guidelines for Breastfeeding and Substance Use or Use Disorder.pdf](http://www.bfmed.org/Media/Files/Protocols/Guidelines%20for%20Breastfeeding%20and%20Substance%20Use%20or%20Use%20Disorder.pdf)

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