

DRINK 'TIL IT'S PINK?

Think Again

BY CATHERINE RUHL, CNM, MS

You can drink until the line on the pregnancy test is pink, your girlfriends say. Sounds catchy and you like not putting your life on hold until the magic moment of conception occurs. But you wonder: Are there reasons not to drink while you're trying, and hoping, to become pregnant?

As with all health decisions, consider the evidence so you can make an informed choice that you can live with later. Here's what you should know:

Does drinking affect my fertility?

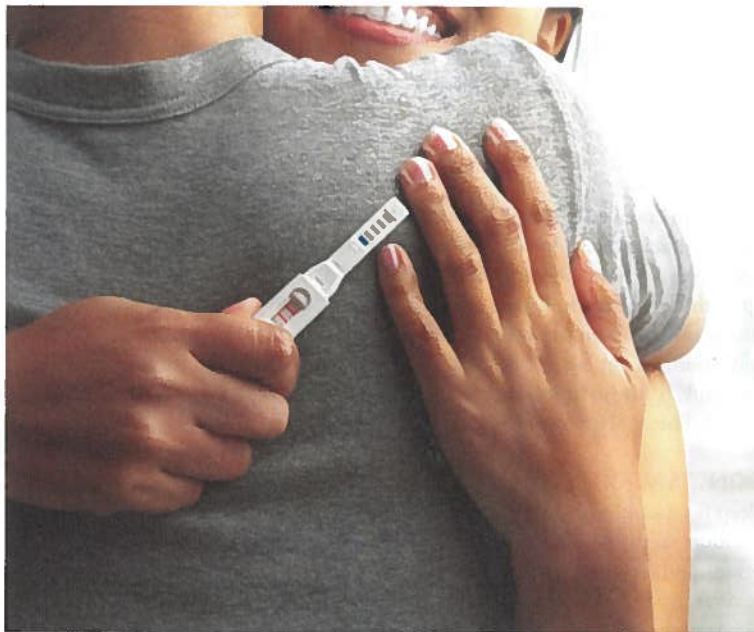
Yes, several well-done studies have shown that drinking even 1 to 5 drinks a week decreases a woman's fertility. Women undergoing in vitro fertilization showed a significant decrease in their odds of a live birth when they drank 4 or more drinks per week, according to Harvard University.

What about alcohol and men's fertility?

Men don't get a pass either. Heavy drinking can lower a man's testosterone and sperm counts as well as decrease libido and even cause impotence. It's recommended that guys drink within the guidelines for moderate alcohol consumption; the CDC says that's not more than 2 drinks a day.

When I'm trying to get pregnant, what is the riskiest time during my monthly cycle to drink alcohol?

If you have a 28-day cycle, ovulation occurs around the 14th day after the first day of your last period. So, starting at mid-cycle you could be pregnant. In the 2 weeks between ovulation and when a pregnancy test could show the magic pink line the biggest risk of drinking is miscarriage. Alcohol can prevent a pregnancy from implanting on the lining of your uterus so heavy drinking or bingeing is particularly risky.



Can drinking in early pregnancy affect my baby?

The first 8 weeks of pregnancy are called the embryonic stage; this is when your baby's organs and systems are forming. It's important to avoid any alcohol during this time because it can cause significant birth defects. Many women don't know they're pregnant in those earliest weeks. So, if you're not using birth control and you're having sex, you shouldn't be drinking alcohol during this time.

If you drink during pregnancy, after this earliest stage, alcohol's effects on your baby's brain may cause future behavior and learning problems—a condition known as fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD).

The bottom line about drinking and pregnancy?

When it comes to drinking, there's no safe time in pregnancy, no safe amount and no safe type of alcohol.

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What's 1 Alcoholic Drink



1 Drink:
12 ounces of 5% beer, 8 oz 7% malt liquor, 5 oz of 12% wine, 1.5 oz hard liquor



Binge drinking:
4 or more for women, 5 or more for men on one occasion



Heavy drinking:
8 or more per week for women, 15 or more for men

Source: CDC