

# Do pregnancy and alcohol mix?

*You may have read that new pregnancy book, or had friends or family share their opinions about alcohol and pregnancy. Here are the facts.*

There is no safe amount, no safe time and no safe kind of alcohol during pregnancy.

If you drink any type of alcohol while you are pregnant, you are at risk of having a baby with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). FASD is a term used to describe the range of disabilities that may affect a person whose mother drank alcohol during pregnancy. These disabilities may be physical, mental, behavioural, and/or related to learning. FASD affects an estimated one per cent of the general population regardless of ethnicity, income or educational level.

Even small amounts of alcohol in a mother's system can be toxic to a developing baby and could lead to permanent brain damage.

The possibility of FASD exists whether a pregnant woman drinks a lot (binge, heavy) or a little (social or occasional). Scientists and researchers do not fully understand why prenatal alcohol exposure affects each fetus differently.

FASD can't be cured. But it can be prevented. Alcohol use during pregnancy is the only cause for this disability.

Prevention is not as simple as it seems – many people don't understand the possible effects of alcohol use during pregnancy. But 50 per cent of pregnancies are unplanned. So even if they do understand the possible effects, many women have been drinking before they realize they are pregnant. They have already exposed their developing baby to alcohol.

Partners, family and friends have a part to play in prevention by supporting women to make the decision not to drink if they are considering becoming pregnant or are pregnant.

For information on alcohol and pregnancy, visit [www.motherisk.org](http://www.motherisk.org) or call the Motherisk Helpline 1-877-439-2744.

If you are worried about your alcohol use, talk to your healthcare provider. You can make a confidential call to the Motherisk Alcohol and Substance Use Helpline 1-877-327-4636 for information about the effects of alcohol during pregnancy. You can also make a confidential call to Health Connection and speak with a public health nurse (details below).



## Strategies to stop drinking

Things to say to others who offer you alcohol or expect you to drink...

- ◆ Pat your tummy and say
  - “no thanks, I'm thinking about my baby,”
  - “no thanks, I'm pregnant and I'll pass,”
  - “I'll have a club soda with lime,”
  - or just “no thanks,” and change the subject.

Ways to stay social without drinking...

- ◆ Stay around people who will help you to not drink. Ask them if they would not drink around you.
- ◆ Avoid risky places and situations. Stay away from bars and clubs. At parties, stay away from the drinks table. Stick with those who aren't drinking.

Other helpful tips...

- ◆ Drink plenty of water.
- ◆ Do not keep alcohol at home.
- ◆ Get some exercise: take a walk, dance, go for a swim.
- ◆ Keep stress away: take a long bath, meditate, take some deep breaths.
- ◆ Be proud of yourself for doing all you can to have a healthy baby.





# Health MATTERS

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## A germ-free dip in the local pool

*Thinking of burrowing under the blankets for the rest of the winter? A swim in the local pool is a warm option that offers safe exercise for all ages.*



Regulations require pool operators and inspectors to take steps to keep people safe. Public health inspectors visit all public pools and spas to ensure the rules are followed and the water is safe. But keeping a pool free of germs involves more than that. You also need to play a role in keeping yourself and the swimmers around you safe. Safe swimming conditions depend on what swimmers bring into – and keep out of – the pool.

### The strong chlorine smell

Have you ever been to a pool and your eyes started to sting and turn red, or you got a whiff of a strong chemical smell and thought to yourself, “Wow, there’s a lot of chlorine in this pool.”? It’s actually not the chlorine bothering you – it’s the chloramines.

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When the chlorine in a pool mixes with what comes out of swimmers (e.g. urine) or what washes off their bodies (e.g. sweat), it can create chloramines. These chloramines irritate the eyes and respiratory tract, can aggravate asthma, and are also what give pools a strong chemical smell.

Even when the levels of chlorine and other pool water treatments are well maintained, they don’t always kill germs instantly.

When swimming in pools practise these simple and effective swimming behaviours to protect yourself and others from water-borne illness:

- ◆ Shower with soap before you swim to remove all lotions and natural body oils.
- ◆ Keep the pee and poo out of the water.
- ◆ Don’t swim when you have diarrhea or have had diarrhea within the past two weeks. Even microscopic amounts of fecal matter can contaminate an entire pool or hot tub.
- ◆ Take frequent bathroom breaks.
- ◆ Wash your hands after using the toilet or changing diapers.
- ◆ Take a rinse shower before you get back into the water.
- ◆ Take children on bathroom breaks every 60 minutes or check diapers every 30–60 minutes.
- ◆ Change diapers in the bathroom or diaper-changing area, not poolside where germs can get into the water.
- ◆ Don’t swallow the water you swim in.



# If it's on the Web, it must be true – right?



*You can find information on any topic you want on the internet (and some info you may not want).*

Having access to all this information is great. But when it comes to your health, how do you tell what information you can trust?

Some things to look for:

## Accuracy

Is the website free of spelling and grammar errors? Does it back up its evidence with trusted references like medical journals like the Canadian Medical Association Journal CMAJ.

## Authority, Bias, Objectivity

Who publishes the page? Trusted organizations include medical associations, government organizations, and health units.

People often publish personal websites. It can be interesting and helpful to read about another person's experience with a certain disease. In terms of treatment, though, what works for them might not work for you.

Pharmaceutical companies and non-profit groups also publish websites. What might they have to gain by providing the information? Can you tell if you are looking at an advertisement? Think of the late-night infomercials you have seen; they make claims to sell a product. Websites might be advertising products, too.

A good "About Us" page will show you who is behind the site. If you're on a university website, check to see if the author is a student or professor. You probably don't want to get your medical advice from a first-year student.

## Currency

Do you see a "last updated" date on the website? Although there isn't an exact expiry date for health information, you want to make sure the information you are reading is up-to-date.

## HONcode

Look for the "HONcode" seal on websites that offer medical or health information. It's a sign that the creators followed the principles created by the Health On the Net Foundation, a non-profit, non-governmental organization endorsed by the United Nations. Adding the seal to a website shows the authors intend to be transparent and objective with health information. It also shows the website supports the doctor-patient relationship, respects privacy, has accurate contact information for more details.



([www.hon.ch/HONcode/Conduct.html](http://www.hon.ch/HONcode/Conduct.html))

Still unsure? Show your health professional the website or the information found on it. Ask them their opinion.

## Resources you can trust

- ◆ The Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit website, is of course a reliable source on a wide variety of public health topics. You can also follow the twitter page [www.twitter.com/SMDhealthunit](http://www.twitter.com/SMDhealthunit) or one of two Facebook pages, [www.facebook.com/simcoe.muskoka](http://www.facebook.com/simcoe.muskoka), for general information or [www.facebook.com/PlaytogetherGrowtogether](http://www.facebook.com/PlaytogetherGrowtogether) for young families.
- ◆ Aboutkidshealth - Information about kids health from the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto. [www.aboutkidshealth.ca/En/Pages/default](http://www.aboutkidshealth.ca/En/Pages/default)
- ◆ sexualityandu.ca - From the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada. Learn about birth control options, STIs, and sexual health. [www.sexualityandu.ca](http://www.sexualityandu.ca)
- ◆ Dietitians of Canada - Contains nutrition information, and tips for grocery planning and shopping. [www.dietitians.ca/Your-Health](http://www.dietitians.ca/Your-Health)
- ◆ Caring for Kids - Information for parents from the Canadian Paediatric Society. [www.caringforkids.cps.ca](http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca)
- ◆ MedlinePlus [www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus) is a service of the U.S. National Library of Medicine with information geared to the general public. More than 900 pages carry information from more than 1,000 organizations.



# The price of eating well

*There are people in Simcoe and Muskoka who cannot afford a nutritious diet.*

Each year, the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit conducts the Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) Survey. Health unit staff visit eight grocery stores in different communities and price the same 67 food items to determine the cost of basic, healthy eating in Simcoe Muskoka. The foods surveyed include a variety of low-cost choices from the four food groups of Canada's Food Guide.

Unfortunately, 2013 results show that most people on Ontario Works or with minimum wage work cannot afford a basic healthy diet.

After paying for food and rent, households on fixed incomes and minimum-wage earners have little if any money left over each month. And they must still cover other basic expenses such as phone, laundry, transportation, medicine, clothing, child care, and the extra costs of having children in school.



## A wage may not be enough

Having a job is no guarantee that income will cover expenses. Missing out on healthy food is a problem of inadequate income. According to the 2013 NFB survey, a family of four with one full-time, minimum-wage earner spends 72% of their income on food and rent alone!

Homelessness trumps a full stomach and healthy choices. When faced with limited income, food becomes a flexible expense, resulting in poor nutritional choices. A diet of poor nutritional value increases the risk of chronic diseases like heart disease, diabetes and mental illness. Children also experience poorer physical and mental health, increasing the risk of depression, behaviour problems, and difficulty at school.

In 2011–2012, it was estimated that nine per cent of households in Simcoe Muskoka had to choose foods of poorer quality due to lack of money. In the most severe cases, they had to skip meals and reduce the amount of food eaten to make ends meet.

## Work for change to reduce poverty

**Learn** about poverty issues and hunger in your community.

**Look** for ways to help make community food programs available to everyone in the community. You can do this by participating in a community kitchen, Good Food Box or Fresh Food Basket program, community garden, or school nutrition program.

**Listen** Everyone has a story to tell. Listen and think about the ways in which people's situations shape their ability to be healthy. Start by watching the short video "Let's Start a Conversation About Health... and Not Talk About Health Care at All."

[www.simcoemuskokahealth.org/JFY/OurCommunity/DOH](http://www.simcoemuskokahealth.org/JFY/OurCommunity/DOH)

Tell your story. You make a difference when you make your voice heard; with friends, work colleagues and elected officials.

**Get Involved** Join groups working to reduce poverty and increase food security in our communities.

To learn more and get involved in dealing with the links between poverty, food security and health, visit these organizations' websites.

The Cost of Healthy Eating (Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit) – look for a link on the health unit home page at [www.simcoemuskokahealth.org](http://www.simcoemuskokahealth.org)

Food in Simcoe County [www.foodinsimcoecounty.ca](http://www.foodinsimcoecounty.ca)

Food security in Muskoka [www.savourmuskoka.ca/food-charter](http://www.savourmuskoka.ca/food-charter)

