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How much is
too much
when you're
pregnant?

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How much is too much when you're pregnant?

Alcohol consumption during pregnancy – any amount of alcohol – could be a sentence of lifetime disability for an unborn child.

Every day in Canada, one child is born with fetal alcohol syndrome or fetal alcohol effects (FAS/FAE). Children with FAS/FAE can suffer from:

- learning disabilities
- hyperactivity
- attention or memory deficits
- inability to manage anger
- poor judgement
- difficulties with problem solving.

These problems may lead to others in later life, such as crime or alcohol and drug abuse.

FAS/FAE is considered one of the leading preventable birth defects in Canada. About 1 to 3 live births per 1,000 are affected, although the incidence appears higher in some Aboriginal communities.

Recent high-profile media reports of adults with FAS/FAE committing serious crimes tell only a small part of the whole story. Many people with FAS/FAE, struggling with the effects of the neurological damage caused by prenatal alcohol exposure, need life-long care and support. The cost in Canada of providing such support is not known, but FAS-related lifetime extra health care, education and social service costs in the United States are estimated to be \$1.4 million (U.S.) *per person affected*.

In a recent survey done for Health Canada to measure the knowledge of the effects of alcohol use during pregnancy, 60 per cent of the survey respondents (male and female) said cutting down on or stopping using alcohol would be one of the most important things that pregnant women might do to increase the likelihood that their baby will be born healthy. Many women also said they would be most receptive to support and encouragement from their spouses to stop or cut back.

How much is too much?

As researchers have not been able to determine a safe level of drinking during pregnancy, there's only **one safe course if you are pregnant or wish to become pregnant: don't drink alcohol.**

Even moderate alcohol consumption during pregnancy can have serious, long-term adverse effects on the fetus and child. Some studies have shown that children born to mothers who have on average one to two drinks per day, or may occasionally have up to five or more drinks at a time, are at increased risk for learning disabilities and other cognitive and behavioural problems.

What does alcohol do to the fetus? When a pregnant woman drinks alcohol, it rapidly crosses the barrier of the placenta into the fetus. The brain and central nervous system of the unborn child can be damaged by prenatal exposure to alcohol, at any time during pregnancy.



WHAT ARE FAS AND FAE?

FAS/FAE is one of the major known preventable birth defects among children, with an estimated rate of 1 to 3 per 1,000 live births in industrialized countries. Initial studies suggest that the rates of FAS/FAE in some Aboriginal communities may be significantly higher.

Fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) refers to a specific cluster of anomalies associated with the use of alcohol during pregnancy.

The three main traits of FAS are:

prenatal and/or postnatal growth restriction

characteristic facial features

central nervous system involvement.

Fetal alcohol effects (FAE) is a term to describe children with prenatal exposure to alcohol, but only some FAS characteristics.

The Government of Canada is providing \$11 million over three years to support a range of initiatives to enhance FAS/FAE activities related to public awareness and education, training and capacity development, early identification, diagnosis and intervention, surveillance, and support to community-based programs. These efforts are complemented by other federal initiatives to improve the health of children and families, such as the [Community Action Program for Children](#), the [Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program](#), and [Aboriginal Head Start](#). The FAS/FAE initiative will build on existing programs as well as on valuable work undertaken by provinces and territories, Aboriginal organizations, and national, local, parent and community groups.

Health Canada has also established a [National Advisory Committee on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Fetal Alcohol Effects](#) to provide advice and recommendations on FAS/FAE.

Find out more online via magazine.health-canada.net

Are you one of the 700,000
Canadians who have diabetes
and don't know it?

Diabetes

the hidden menace

An estimated 2 million Canadians have diabetes, and one-third of them are undiagnosed. About 60,000 new cases are diagnosed in Canada every year.

Among First Nations people, the prevalence of diabetes is three times the national average. **First Nations people with diabetes** have complications more frequently than other groups, and often at an earlier age.

It is only partly true that diabetes can't be prevented. Certainly, people of an advanced age or with a family history of diabetes have a higher risk of being diagnosed with the disease. But there are other risk factors – such as excessive overweight, poor diet, and physical inactivity – that are preventable. Scientific studies have shown that the adverse effects of diabetes can be prevented through good management of blood glucose levels.

The growth of diabetes is at epidemic levels. In response, the federal government is joining the provinces, territories, and private organizations, in a five-year, \$115-million **Canadian Diabetes Strategy**.

The Strategy will include a national component that will pursue three priorities:

Prevention and promotion

About 90% of diabetics have Type 2 diabetes. Two major risk factors for Type 2 are obesity and inactivity. The Strategy will link with healthy eating, nutrition and active living programs to educate target audiences on how to eat better and become more active.

Surveillance

By painting an accurate national picture of diabetes and its effects, the Strategy will help health care professionals develop programs that teach Canadians how to prevent and control the disease.

National coordination

This component of the Strategy will establish a national action plan to ensure that resources are used efficiently.

Another major part of the Strategy is the \$58-million **Aboriginal Diabetes Initiative** to help decrease diabetes and its complications amongst Aboriginal people.

The Canadian Diabetes Strategy, first announced in the February 1999 federal budget, has simple goals, says Health Minister Allan Rock: "To inform Canadians, prevent diabetes where feasible, and help people better manage the disease and its complications."

SPOTLIGHT

Diabetes interferes with the body's ability to produce or properly use insulin, a hormone that is essential for the proper use of the energy contained in the food we eat. This results in a series of malfunctions, which include an excess of a type of sugar called glucose in tests on the blood and urine.

Types

Type 1: the body makes little or no insulin

Type 2: the body makes insulin, but cannot use it

Ninety per cent of people with diabetes have Type 2.

Symptoms may include:

increased thirst and hunger

frequent urination

unusual weight loss

extreme fatigue

dry, itchy skin

slow healing of cuts or sores

frequent infections

sweet-smelling breath

blurred eyesight

Complications

Diabetes is a major cause of other diseases or chronic conditions, such as

kidney disease

heart disease

stroke

blindness

impotence in men

pregnancy complications in women

Find out more online via
magazine.health-canada.net

Quick Clicks

No miracle cures... just reliable health information

So much health information online. Some reliable, some doubtful, some downright dangerous.

Enter the **Canadian Health Network** at <http://canadian-health-network.ca>. With its motto, "Health information you can trust", the CHN gives surfers access to a huge list of reliable health information available through Health Canada and about **450 partner organizations**, such as the Canadian Cancer Society, the Alzheimer Society of Canada, university research centres, and provincial and territorial government agencies.

While the CHN focuses on how to lead a healthier life and prevent disease, it will soon include other topics, including self-care and how the health system is performing. It will be a single door to a world of health information that will help Canadians make choices about health and well-being.



<http://canadian-health-network.ca>

Streamlined searches

By bringing together existing expertise and proven information sources from publicly-funded health resource organizations, the CHN is an efficient way to bring Canadians health information they can trust, says Bryan Hayday, CHN's chief executive officer.

"For example, if a Canadian woman looking for information about stress searches on one of the thousands of health Web sites available today, she may be faced with thousands of results on a single health site alone," says Mr. Hayday. "If she were to type in the same search term on the Canadian Health Network, today, she would get about 35 results. Furthermore, the results would be from Canadian resources that are proven trustworthy, and she could quickly narrow her search to find resources and support in her region."

CHN, one of a family of new information tools funded by and developed in partnership with Health Canada, will receive \$32 million in federal funding over three years.

HEALTH'S E-FAMILY

There are other health information and communications technology initiatives that will receive substantial Government of Canada support:

- The *Canada Health Infoway* will be the health lane of the Canadian information highway.
- The *National Health Surveillance Network* will gather and analyse health intelligence information and make it available to provincial and territorial health officials, so that they can make informed decisions about public health.
- The *First Nations Health Information System* will ensure that all First Nations communities have community-based health information systems linked to national surveillance programs and components of provincial databases.

Find out more online via magazine.health-canada.net

MEDICINAL Marijuana

Advocates of making marijuana available as a medical treatment argue that the drug helps relieve nausea and vomiting related to AIDS and cancer therapies, and is effective in treating other diseases or conditions, including anorexia, chronic pain, epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, glaucoma, arthritis, and migraine.

At present there is no scientific evidence to confirm these claims. All the same, a growing number of Canadians have requested that marijuana be legally made available to people who could benefit from its use.

In response, Health Canada released a report in June 1999 announcing a research plan for the use of marijuana for medicinal purposes. At the same time, authority under section 56 of the *Controlled Drug and Substance Act* (CDSA) was exercised to allow a few individuals to possess and cultivate marijuana for their own medical use. (Applicants must demonstrate that the exemption is necessary for medical purposes.)

WHAT IS MARIJUANA?

Marijuana, hashish, and hash oil are generally derived from the plant *Cannabis sativa*. The main psychoactive substance (the chemical that gives pot smokers a "high") is generally believed to be THC (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol).

In an [update to the report](#) made in October, Health Minister Allan Rock said the federal government recognized the need to take "a compassionate approach to those who are seriously sick or dying and who believe that access to marijuana will help relieve their suffering."

Plans in the works

Giving some people access to marijuana for medicinal purposes is not the end of the story. Health Canada is also

- moving ahead with a [plan](#) to support [research](#) in Canada on marijuana for medicinal purposes

- facilitating the finding of research-grade marijuana for research projects
- working with the [Community Research Initiative of Toronto \(CRIT\)](#) and the [Canadian HIV Trials Network \(CTN\)](#) to support a research project with marijuana for medicinal purposes
- consulting with various groups, including patients and physicians, on issues such as the section 56 exemption process
- following up on a [request for proposal](#) to establish a Canadian source of quality, standardized, affordable research-grade marijuana.

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E-mail: info@www.hc-sc.gc.ca
www.hc-sc.gc.ca

Smart Summer

Fun

Get smart this summer.

Whether you're firing up the backyard barbecue, taking the family on vacation, cycling, inline skating, or just relaxing at the beach or cottage, here are some tips on how to get the most out of the season.

Why wear sunglasses?

Properly chosen sunglasses can help your vision by reducing glare, improving contrast and making you feel more comfortable when out in the sun. Sunglasses can also help prevent some direct damage to the eye from light. It's not necessary to buy high-priced brands to get good UV protection, as most sunglasses now on the market block a large percentage of UV radiation. It makes sense to wear sunglasses when it's sunny – both for comfort and to reduce any risk from UV and blue light.

Sun safety

To avoid the harmful effects of ultraviolet rays:

- Select shaded areas for outdoor activities.
- Wear a broad-brimmed hat when you have to spend long periods in the sun.
- If you can't cover up, use a sun-screen lotion which has a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of at least 15. Make sure it has both UVA and UVB protection. Re-apply it every two hours, as well as after swimming.
- Avoid tanning altogether or at least avoid tanning for long periods, particularly between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. during the summer months.
- Avoid using sun lamps.



- Be careful of medication. Certain prescriptions such as tetracycline can make your skin more sensitive to UV rays. Consult your doctor if you have any questions about your medication.

Safe fun in the water

Help keep recreational water safe:

- Avoid going in the water if you have an open wound or an infection.
- Don't use soap in recreational water. Soap nourishes algae and bacteria, helping them to grow.
- Take limited amounts of food to beaches to discourage animals and birds which leave droppings. Don't feed animals or birds, and securely close garbage bins.
- Pick up your pet's droppings and dispose of them hygienically.
- Avoid using fertilizers near recreational water.
- If you live in a rural area make sure your septic system works properly.
- Practise pollution-free boating by disposing of human wastes hygienically.
- Encourage your municipality and local industry to treat waste properly.

Summertime food safety reminders

- **Clean:** Wash hands and surfaces often.
- **Chill:** Refrigerate promptly.
- **Cook:** Cook to proper temperatures.
- **Separate:** Don't cross-contaminate.



Get more smart summer fun tips online at magazine.health-canada.net