

# Drinking Alcohol while Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding is the optimal method of infant nutrition. It is healthier than formula feeding for both infants and their mothers. This desk reference provides important information for health care providers about reducing any possible negative effects of alcohol while continuing to support breastfeeding.

Alcohol consumed by the mother passes into her bloodstream and her breast milk. Alcohol levels in the breast milk are similar to the blood alcohol levels of the mother at the time of feeding. Alcohol leaves the body as it is metabolized. A breastfeeding infant is exposed to a very small amount of the alcohol the mother drinks, but infants detoxify alcohol in their first weeks of life at half the rate of adults. Alcohol is not stored in the breast milk and passed to the infant at a later feeding. **Having an occasional alcoholic drink has not been shown to be harmful to a breastfed infant.** A single exposure of alcohol from breast milk may have a mildly sedating effect or alter the odour or taste of the breast milk. Ideally it is best to avoid breastfeeding for about 2 hours after drinking one alcoholic beverage. Women may want to express breast milk to relieve any engorgement for their own comfort.

**Excessive use of alcohol can affect milk flow in lactating mothers.** Adverse effects on nursing infants can include:

- ▶ Impaired motor development
- ▶ Changes in sleep patterns
- ▶ Decrease in milk intake
- ▶ Risk of hypoglycemia

**Excessive or daily intake of alcohol is not recommended for any mother due to issues of impairment of care and the risk of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder for a subsequent pregnancy.**

- ▶ Women can protect their infants from the adverse effects of alcohol by scheduling their occasional alcohol consumption around breastfeeding. Mothers of infants who go several hours without breastfeeding may benefit from information you can share from the attached table.

**For more information on alcohol and breastfeeding call Motherisk Helpline: 1-877-327-4636**

Adapted from Koren, G. *Drinking alcohol while breastfeeding. Motherisk Update. Canadian Family Physician* 2002; 48:39-41

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Ontario's maternal, newborn and early  
child development resource centre  
Centre de ressources sur la maternité,  
les nouveau-nés et le développement  
des jeunes enfants de l'Ontario

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**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).