

## **ALCOHOL HARMS YOUR BABY!**

### **Drinking Advice to Pregnant Women**

#### **Do not give alcohol a chance to harm your baby.**

- Your safest choice is not to drink alcohol at all during pregnancy.
- Consuming alcohol at low to moderate level during pregnancy may bring physiological and neurodevelopmental harms to your baby.
- Findings from literature review show that low-to-moderate levels of pregnancy drinking could lead to severe harms to the baby, such as pre-term birth<sup>1</sup>, low birth weight<sup>2</sup>, poor mental development<sup>3</sup>, and increased risk of anxiety and depression<sup>4</sup>. There is no established safe level for alcohol use during pregnancy. Research findings show that drinking even 1 drink per day could result in long-term detrimental effects on behaviour and the brain of baby<sup>5</sup>.
- The health authorities worldwide (e.g. Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, and Australia) suggest that abstinence from alcohol during pregnancy is the safest choice.

#### **Be aware that pregnancy drinking could lead to Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)!**

- FASD is an umbrella term that describes a full spectrum of birth defects that might occur in an individual whose mother consumed alcohol during pregnancy. These defects can range from mild to severe.
- According to the type of symptoms, FASD is described into different diagnostic terms: fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS), alcohol-related neurodevelopmental disorder (ARND), and alcohol-related birth defects (ARBD)<sup>6</sup>. Some examples of the signs and symptoms include abnormal facial features, problems with the heart, kidneys, or bones, hyperactive behaviour, and learning difficulty.
- FAS, the most severe end of FASD, happens to individuals who are exposed to high level of prenatal alcohol consumption. The full-blown FAS phenotype could be seen in patients whose mothers had a pattern of chronic, daily, heavy alcohol use, or of frequent, heavy, intermittent alcohol use<sup>7</sup>.

#### **Rumour has it that pregnancy drinking has some benefits (e.g. improved circulation and stress relief). Do not drink because of the unproven rumours or misconceptions.**

- Common misconceptions towards drinking include:
  - ✧ Consuming small amount of alcohol occasionally would improve 'qi' and promote blood circulation.

- ✧ Alcohol would reduce anxiety and depression of pregnant women.
- ✧ Occasional and small amount of pregnancy drinking can be beneficial.
- However, pregnant women should be aware that these so-called benefits are lack of evidence support, whereas the harms to the baby brought by pregnancy drinking are well established by scientific researches. Moreover, pregnancy drinking can bring about various types of severe consequences to the baby (e.g. preterm birth, increased risk of anxiety/depression). Even more adverse health outcomes (e.g. FASD) to the baby could be resulted from higher level of prenatal alcohol exposure.
- There are more effective means to get relieved and alcohol use may increase stress instead. Stay away from pregnancy drinking to avoid the harms well supported by scientific evidence.

### **Abstain from drinking during pregnancy so you will not have any future regrets**

- Previous pregnancy outcome can affect the perception of risk due to alcohol consumption and thus drinking behaviour while pregnant among expectant mothers. Women who drank and gave birth to a healthy baby tend to view prenatal alcohol consumption as less risky, so they tend to drink more in the next pregnancy<sup>8</sup>.
- In fact, scientific evidence suggests that low-to-moderate levels of pregnancy drinking could lead to serious consequences to the baby such as pre-term birth, low birth weight, poor mental development, and increased risk of suffering anxiety and depression disorders in the future<sup>1-4</sup>.
- Despite having given birth to a healthy baby, pregnant women who drink should be reminded that there is strong evidence showing pregnancy drinking can have grave harms. Using alcohol during pregnancy is no different from putting the well-being of their baby at stake. It will be too late to regret if any permanent harm is caused to their baby by alcohol exposure before birth.

### **Reference**

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