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Alcohol and Breastfeeding

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The effect of maternal consumption of alcohol is insignificant except at high or regular consumption levels

- Alcohol passes freely into breastmilk reaching approximately maternal levels.
- Chronic exposure to more than 2 units per day may have an affect on development.
- Maternal blood levels have to reach 300mg/100ml before mild sedation is reached in the baby (this compares with a level of 80mg/100ml needed to fail the police breath test)
- Reduction of let down is reported when the mother drinks heavily
- Peak levels in the milk appear after 30 –90 minutes
- Excess levels of alcohol in milk may lead to drowsiness, deep sleep, weakness and decreased growth in the infant.
- To reduce exposure of the baby to alcohol, avoid breastfeeding for 2-3 hours after drinking.
- Chronic consumption of alcohol is more likely to cause harm than occasional social drinking.
- Alcohol may reduce the baby's sucking time at the breast but not the volume of milk consumed
- Alcohol, particularly Guinness and stout, has in the past been recommended to increase milk production. This may be due to relaxation and increased fluid intake, as much as to any galactagogue properties. Non alcoholic beers seem to have similar prolactin stimulating properties.
- It is not necessary to express breastmilk off to clear it of alcohol, as the mother's blood levels fall, the level of alcohol in the breastmilk will decrease.
- If vomiting occurs as a result of too much alcohol breastfeeding should be avoided until the following morning.

To find your nearest Breastfeeding Supporter call the Supporterline 0300 100 0210

Calls to 0300 numbers cost no more than calls to UK numbers starting 01 and 02 and will be part of any inclusive minutes that apply to your provider and call package

*The Breastfeeding Network is a Company Limited by Guarantee Registered in Scotland Company No. 330639
Registered office Alexander Sloan, Chartered Accountants, 38 Cadogan Street, Glasgow, G2 7HF
The Breastfeeding Network is a Registered Scottish Charity No SC027007*

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- Mothers who have been drinking alcohol should never let themselves be in a situation where they might fall asleep with the baby; on a bed, chair or settee (this would also apply to other carers who have been drinking alcohol).
- Drinking alcohol reduces the ability of the mother to be aware of her baby's needs, whether she is breastfeeding or not. It is safest to ask someone else to care for the baby.
- For health reasons women should not drink more than 14 units of alcohol spread out over the whole week.