

## FETAL ALCOHOL SYNDROME



Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) is the most common known preventable cause of mental impairment. Babies with FAS have distinctive changes in their facial features and they may be born small. The brain damage that occurs with FAS can result in lifelong problems with learning, memory, attention, and problem solving. These alcohol-related changes in the brain may be present even in babies whose appearance and growth are not affected.

It is not known if there is any safe drinking level during pregnancy; nor is there any stage of pregnancy in which drinking—at any level—is known to be risk free. **If a woman is pregnant, or wants to become pregnant, she should not drink alcohol.** Even if she is pregnant and already has consumed alcohol, it is important to stop drinking for the rest of her pregnancy. Stopping can reduce the chances that her child might be harmed by alcohol.



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## ALCOHOL AND WOMEN



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## HOW MUCH DO WOMEN DRINK?

Studies of the general population reveal that **fewer women than men drink**. IUP statistics reveal the same. At IUP 74 percent of women report they drink once a week or less versus 63 percent of men. Twenty-six percent of IUP women report drinking MORE than once a week versus 37 percent of males.

Women are also **less likely to drink heavily** than men. Seventy-five percent of IUP females report when they do drink, they drink four drinks or fewer versus 65 percent of men. Only 15 percent of IUP women report drinking eight drinks or more per event versus 21 percent for males.



**HOWEVER**, women are affected by alcohol differently than men. Drinking can be much more dangerous for women, even in small amounts.

## ALCOHOL EFFECTS

Women achieve higher concentrations of alcohol in the blood and become more impaired than men after drinking equivalent amounts of alcohol. Why is this?

- In general, women have less body water than men of similar body weight, so women achieve higher concentrations of alcohol in the blood after drinking equivalent amounts of alcohol. Which means they have less body water to dilute the alcohol and become intoxicated more quickly.
- They also produce less enzymes in their stomachs to break down alcohol. Therefore, alcohol goes into the blood stream and brain more rapidly.
- Women also tend to have a higher fat concentration, which keeps alcohol in our body longer.
- Estrogen plays a role in alcohol absorption. When estrogen levels peak (2 weeks before menstruation), alcohol absorption increases.



## PROBLEM DRINKING

Fewer women than men drink. However, among the heaviest drinkers, women equal or surpass men in the number of problems that result from their drinking. For example, female alcoholics have death rates 50 to 100 percent higher than those of male alcoholics, including deaths from suicides, alcohol-related accidents, heart disease and stroke, and liver cirrhosis.

## GUIDELINES

The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* define moderate drinking as no more than one drink a day for women and no more than two drinks a day for men.

The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* point out that drinking more than one drink per day for women can increase the risk for motor vehicle crashes, other injuries, high blood pressure, stroke, violence, suicide, and certain types of cancer.

