

Pregnant women's drinking correlates with their partner's drinking

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Pregnant women's use of alcohol correlates with that of their partner, a new study from the University of Eastern Finland and Kuopio University Hospital shows. Paying attention to both parents' use of alcohol may help to prevent drinking during pregnancy, as well as fetal exposure to the adverse effects of alcohol.

Exposure to [alcohol](#) is detrimental to fetal development, and there is no known safe limit of exposure. The harmful effects of alcohol may manifest during the child's development and growth in many ways. The risk of alcohol use during pregnancy has previously been assessed mainly on the basis of the expectant mother's previous use of alcohol, but not on the basis of their [partner](#)'s drinking habits.

The new study looked at the alcohol consumption of 14,822 Finnish women and their partners before and during pregnancy. The study covered a total of 21,472 pregnancies between 2009 and 2018.

In 86% of the pregnancies, the expectant mother reported having used alcohol before pregnancy, and 4.5% also during pregnancy. In 25% of the pregnancies, women reported that they had stopped drinking only after learning about their pregnancy, which means that the fetus may have been exposed to alcohol in the early stages of pregnancy. However, partners generally did not reduce their alcohol consumption before or during pregnancy.

Before pregnancy, partners' alcohol use was strongly linked to the frequency and quantity of alcohol consumed by women, how often they binge drank, and whether their drinking met the criteria for risk use. A weaker, yet significant association was observed also during pregnancy. In women who consumed alcohol during pregnancy, the quantity of alcohol used, for example, was affected by their partner's use of alcohol.

Women who reported having used alcohol during pregnancy were usually heavy drinkers before pregnancy. Younger [women](#) had higher alcohol use risk scores before pregnancy, but during pregnancy their alcohol consumption did not differ from other age groups.

According to the researchers, the results show that, in order to protect the fetus from exposure to alcohol, both [parents](#) should reduce their

alcohol consumption already when planning pregnancy. Both parents need information on the harmful effects of alcohol on the fetus, and when assessing the risk of alcohol consumption during pregnancy, the use of alcohol should be taken into account not only for the expectant mother, but also for the partner. The partner's support may help to avoid [alcohol consumption](#) during [pregnancy](#).

"Our findings are well in line with those from other European and American studies. There can, of course, be great local variation in maternal drinking between different sub-populations. When it comes to partners, we noticed that Finns seem to reduce their alcohol use less than what has been observed in other Nordic studies, but otherwise that, too, is in line with other Western countries," Senior Researcher Olli Kärkkäinen from the University of Eastern Finland says.

The research was published in *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*.

More information: Taija Voutilainen et al, Self-reported alcohol consumption of pregnant women and their partners correlates both before and during pregnancy: A cohort study with 21,472 singleton pregnancies, *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research* (2022). [DOI: 10.1111/acer.14806](https://doi.org/10.1111/acer.14806)

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