



Alcohol and Breastfeeding

A mother's body protects her baby against the effects of alcohol in two ways.

- Alcohol inhibits lactation hormones, and oxytocin is thus reduced. This causes a delay in milk let-down, which ultimately results in less milk getting to the baby.
- Alcohol is metabolized more quickly in a lactating woman. Thus the blood alcohol concentration stays lower in lactating mothers than an equal amount of alcohol in either formula-feeding mothers or women without babies.

This information provides further evidence that alcohol, including beer, DOES NOT increase breast milk production!

The concentration of alcohol in breast milk is directly related to the concentration of alcohol in a mother's blood stream. Thus, as a mother's blood alcohol level rises, so does her milk alcohol level. Conversely, as her blood alcohol level falls, alcohol moves out of the breast milk at the same rate. The liver metabolizes alcohol at a rate of about one standard drink (about 5oz wine) per 1.5 hours.

So what is the bottom line regarding alcohol and breastfeeding?

- **Pumping and dumping is not necessary!** Alcohol passes into and out of breast milk at the same rate as it does in the bloodstream.
- **Alcohol delays the milk let-down**, so breastfeeding with alcohol in the blood stream reduces the amount of breast milk the baby can get.
- **For each standard drink, wait for about 1.5 hours to breastfeed.** This will ensure your baby will get virtually no alcohol.
- **Developmental delay could result** if a baby is exposed to more than 1 standard drink per day via breast milk.

If you have the desire to drink alcohol, this alone is no reason to stop breastfeeding all together, as long as you drink responsibly and follow the above guidelines. There is a chance of some developmental delay if your baby is exposed via breast milk to more than one drink daily. In addition, if you 'feel drunk' you are obviously in no state to care for your child safely, let alone breastfeed. If you anticipate you may drink heavily, pump and store some alcohol-free breast milk before drinking so your baby's caregiver will have something to feed your baby. When you no longer feel intoxicated, your breast milk levels of alcohol will be low enough for you to breastfeed.