



## **Women who drink a glass of wine a day during pregnancy affect their child's growth for nine years**

- Women who drank three units of alcohol a day had babies with stunted features, researchers found**
- Alcohol-related growth restriction present in early infancy and persisted through to nine years of age**

By [Tamara Cohen](#)

Expectant mothers who drink a large glass of wine a day stunt their children's growth, research reveals. Expectant mothers who drink a large glass of wine a day stunt their children's growth up to the age of nine, research reveals.

Scientists at Harvard Medical School found pregnant women who had three units of alcohol a day had babies with a lower height, weight and head circumference than light or non-drinkers.

These effects lasted well past infancy and into childhood, said the study – one of the longest-running into the effects of alcohol on the unborn child.

The researchers tested a group of 85 pregnant women, defined as 'heavy drinkers', who drank the equivalent of at least a large (250ml) glass of wine a day.

This group was compared with a group of 63 women from the same prenatal clinic, who either did not drink at all or drank 'lightly' – defined as less than one unit a day and no bingeing.

Their children's height, weight and head circumference was measured at the ages of six months, a year, five years and nine years.

Lead author Dr Robert Carter said: 'We found that children born to women who drank heavily during pregnancy had reductions in weight, height, and head circumference, an indicator of brain growth. 'This alcohol-related growth restriction was present in early infancy and persisted through to nine years of age.'

He said the effects may be permanent and affect brain development, giving children a lower IQ for life. Researchers speculate that developmental problems caused by alcohol could prevent babies from feeding properly during infancy.

Children born to heavy drinkers had a four times higher chance of a low birth weight and were significantly lighter at a year old.

The researchers said developmental problems caused by alcohol could stop them feeding properly during infancy.

By the age of five, the children's weight in relation to their height was normal, but they were six times as likely to be anaemic as the children of non-drinking mothers, regardless of their diet.

Those with iron deficiency anaemia at birth were more likely to have stunted growth and Dr Carter said it seemed to be a direct effect of alcohol exposure in the womb.

Researchers tested a group of 85 pregnant women, defined as 'heavy drinkers', consuming at least a large glass of wine or a pint of premium lager a day  
Between the ages of five and nine, the children of non-drinking mothers had an average increase in head circumference of 2 centimetres, compared with 1.6 centimetres for the heavy drinkers.

The women were all of low socioeconomic background and mixed race, recruited from a clinic in Cape Town, South Africa.

The heavy drinkers were encouraged to abstain or cut down but 17 of them – a fifth of the sample – gave birth to children with Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, the main cause of mental retardation in children in the West.

**CHEMOTHERAPY 'WON'T HARM THE BABY'**

Pregnant women who develop cancer can have chemotherapy without endangering their unborn child, say doctors.

A study suggests the greatest harm to babies of women treated with cancer agents is being born prematurely, rather than the drugs.

German researchers say there is no need to interrupt the pregnancy, delay treatment or use less powerful drugs.

They studied more than 400 women across Europe who were diagnosed with early-stage breast cancer while pregnant.

They then assessed whether the newborn babies of the 197 women who had chemotherapy suffered any ill effects.

Babies whose mothers had chemotherapy while pregnant had a lower birth weight on average, The Lancet Oncology journal reports.

But they appeared to have no higher risk of birth defects, blood disorders or alopecia than those born to women who did not have chemotherapy.

Professor Sibylle Loibl, of the German Breast Group which led the study, said the priority is 'a full-term delivery' for women having chemotherapy.

Another 22 had Partial Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.

The effects of heavy drinking were regardless of the women's age at giving birth and whether they smoked or took drugs.

The stunted growth in later childhood was not related to food intake.  
It is thought foetal exposure to alcohol inhibits growth hormones.