

Is Some Alcohol OK During Pregnancy? | Dr. Andrew Huberman

There's an additional category that I wanna highlight of course and this is vitally important to state even though it's obvious which is that people who are pregnant should absolutely not consume alcohol Fetal alcohol syndrome is well known and established It's terrible fetuses experience diminished brain development that's often permanent diminished limb development diminished organ development in the periphery meaning you know the heart the lungs the liver et cetera ingesting alcohol while pregnant is simply a bad idea And the reason I say this at all is first of all it's important to include in an episode like this But also because we can look at two things First of all we can look at mechanism and then we can also look at some of the lore that still sadly exists out there Let's take care of the lore that sadly exists First If you look online you will sometimes be able to find sadly that some people believe that certain kinds of alcohol are not detrimental to fetuses They'll say well champagne is safe for a pregnant mother to drink but beer is not that is absolutely categorically false Alcohol is alcohol There is no evidence whatsoever that consuming certain types of alcohol is safer for fetuses than others Alcohol is a toxin And the reason fetal alcohol syndrome exists is because the ability of that toxin to disrupt cellular processes Remember tumor growth and the way that alcohol can accelerate tumor growth by proliferation of cells the wrong cells the ones you don't want to proliferate Well all of embryonic development all of fetal development it's not the growth of a tumor It's obviously the growth of an embryo and it's done in a very orchestrated way I started off studying brain development That's where I got my beginnings in neurobiology And I still teach embryology to medical students and graduate students The set of coordinated processes that has to take place from conception to birth in order to give rise to a healthy embryo is so so dynamically controlled and so exquisitely precise with checkpoints and recovery mechanisms and redundancy in the genes that are expressed to make sure that if anything goes wrong it's repaired et cetera Alcohol as a mutagen I haven't used that word yet but it substance that can mutate DNA through alterations in DNA methylation and these checkpoints in the cell cycle Alcohol is a mutagen is one of the worst things that a developing embryo can be exposed to And again because it's water soluble and fat soluble ingestion of alcohol when people are pregnant passes right to the

fetus Now I realize that a number of people out there might be thinking oh goodness you know I didn't realize I was pregnant until a certain stage of pregnancy And before I realized I was ingesting alcohol obviously one can't undo what's been done But I want to also emphasize that fetal alcohol syndrome while yes there's a full blown syndrome that manifests as changes in the cranial facial development that are very obvious and you can look these up You've probably seen these before the pictures before Rather it has to do with eye spacing forehead size a number of other features of the cranial facial development And of course stuff's going on in the brain too It's along a continuum So it is possible that some of the changes that occur are more minor And thankfully the young brain in particular the early postnatal brain is incredibly plastic There are things that can be done in order to help recover neural circuits that didn't develop well et cetera But even though it's somewhat obvious or should be obvious I really want to make clear that there's zero evidence whatsoever that certain forms of alcohol are safer for pregnant women to ingest than others Absolutely wrong No one who's pregnant should be ingesting alcohol whatsoever And certainly if people feel like they can't avoid alcohol while pregnant they really need to work with somebody to make sure that it just absolutely doesn't happen because it is so detrimental to the developing fetus