Alcohol Use During Lactation

Casual use of alcohol (such as 5 oz (148ml) of wine, 12 oz (360ml) of beer, or 1.5 oz (45ml) of distilled spirits per day) is unlikely to cause either short- or long-term problems in the human milk-fed infant. However, more than 2 drinks a day can have a negative effect on the infant’s development, possibly causing agitation, sedation, poor sleep patterns, and insufficient weight gain.

Guidelines for Alcohol Use During Lactation

- The highest alcohol levels in milk occur 30 to 60 minutes after an alcoholic beverage.
- The lactating parent can decrease alcohol in their milk by waiting 2-2.5 hours per drink before feeding.
- Directly feeding or pumping within 1 hour before drinking alcohol may slightly reduce the amount of alcohol in the milk.
- The milk alcohol level closely parallels the blood alcohol level. As the blood alcohol level goes down, so does the milk alcohol level.
- Alcohol decreases milk production, with 5 drinks or more decreasing milk letdown and disrupting direct feeding until the parent’s alcohol levels decrease.

Read more about alcohol use during lactation through the US National Institutes of Health's Drugs & Lactation Database (Lactmed).