**Moderate drinking no impact on fertility**

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Drinking moderately does not seem to affect a woman's fertility, a study has found.

About one in eight women in Britain experience difficulties conceiving a baby in the first year of trying to get pregnant.

Consuming low to moderate amounts of alcohol may not affect a woman’s ability to conceive, the study suggests.

But the authors cautioned that women should steer clear of alcohol "during their fertile window until a pregnancy has been ruled out", to ensure they do not accidentally drink while pregnant.

The study examined 6,000 Danish women who were trying to get pregnant, and monitored their drinking habits.

It found that those women who were drinking up to 14 "servings" of alcohol – equivalent to about two bottles of wine – a week had no difference in conception rates within 12 months compared with women drinking no alcohol.

But those who drank more than this amount had an 18 per cent lower chance of getting pregnant, according to the study, which has been published in The BMJ.

"Our study showed that consumption of 14 or more servings of alcohol a week was slightly associated with reduced fecundability, but consumption of lower amounts seemed to have no discernible effect on fertility," the authors wrote.

"Nonetheless, because the fetus may be particularly vulnerable to alcohol during the first few weeks after conception, it would seem prudent for women who are actively trying to become pregnant to abstain from alcohol during their fertile window until a pregnancy has been ruled out."

In an accompanying editorial, Annie Britton, a reader in epidemiology at University College London, wrote: "Infertility can be a devastating experience for couples, with high levels of psychological strain and even risk of suicide.

"This can result in millions of women going through a heartbreaking, all-consuming process, who will inevitably look for lifestyle modifications, including their alcohol consumption, to improve their chances of having a baby."

"Given that it can take many months to become pregnant, a woman may choose not to abstain from drinking for the duration," she added.

"If alcohol is consumed moderately, it seems that this may not affect fertility.

"However, it would be wise to avoid binge-drinking, both for the potential disruption to menstrual cycles and also for the potential harm to a baby during early pregnancy.

"If a couple are experiencing difficulty in conceiving, it makes sense for both partners to cut down on their alcohol intake.

"However, as with many things in life, moderation is key and avoiding guilt can only be a good thing during what can be a very stressful time."

Health guidelines state that women should not drink during pregnancy to avoid harm to a fetus.

The latest guidance from the UK chief medical officers states: "If you are pregnant or think you could become pregnant, the safest approach is not to drink alcohol at all, to keep risks to your baby to a minimum."

Dr Patrick O’Brien, spokesman for the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG), said: "While this study improves understanding of whether alcohol affects fertility in women, it is important that women are aware that high levels of alcohol consumption could be detrimental to their own well-being and that of their unborn child, should they become pregnant.

"The RCOG encourages women of all ages to take a moderate approach to consuming alcohol, which will help to reduce the risk of developing other conditions, including cancer, stroke, heart and liver disease, brain and nervous system damage.

"Women trying to conceive and those who are pregnant should take a precautionary approach and abstain from drinking if possible."