# "We really wanted a good future for our child-to-be and that was worth more than a night out"

*This story was first published on Every Moment Matters - Community Stories. You can read it* [*here.*](https://everymomentmatters.org.au/laurens-story/)

When Lauren Pettis (35) and her husband, Phil, began trying for a baby at the end of 2020, the couple made the conscious decision to go alcohol-free for their pregnancy journey.

“Before we started trying, we decided as a couple to stop drinking for our health and our baby’s. We didn't want to take any unnecessary risks that could cause harm to our child before they even had a chance to experience the world.

“I stopped drinking alcohol because I figured we just didn’t know when we'd fall pregnant. Then in January I was positive on a pregnancy test.”

Discussing her awareness of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and drinking alcohol during pregnancy, Lauren said she wished that it was given the same attention as the importance of breastfeeding or preparing a woman for labour.

“Initially, I was aware of the dangers of drinking during pregnancy, but my husband wasn’t until we talked about it. I came across FASD information while watching a documentary which shared the stories of people with FASD and how it had impacted their lives, such as learning and physical difficulties,” Lauren recalls.

“In my opinion, more education and information should be provided before and during pregnancy about FASD. My doctor did ask me if I was drinking, but it was just one question very early on and that was it.”

Given the time of year the couple started trying for pregnancy and the increase in social occasions that comes with it, Lauren found she was constantly offered alcohol at functions.

“I’d do things like, if people gave me a glass of wine, either sneakily tip it out or replace it with something like soda water and lime. I also found having mocktails or non-alcoholic wine sometimes would work. A lot of the time, people wouldn't even notice.

“I think some of our friends worked out something was going on, but no one pressured me. I was fortunate with the kind of friends I've got. Everyone’s on the same bandwagon – you don't drink while you're pregnant. So there was no pressure from them. I was very lucky that I was in a supportive group.”

For Lauren, having an encouraging group of friends and a husband who decided not to drink alcohol before and during her pregnancy provided additional support for her alcohol-free pregnancy.

“Phil decided he wouldn't drink as well to support me. That helped a lot because we're a team; you should be working as a team with your partner.

“His priority was ensuring the health and safety of our growing family. He found it beneficial for his health too.

“Although we were never heavy drinkers, drinking was often associated with socialising. But we really wanted a good future for our child-to-be and that was worth more than a night out.”

Reflecting on her experience as part of a couple that gave up alcohol, Lauren notes a number of ways partners can encourage their other halves to undertake an alcohol-free pregnancy journey together.

“Giving up alcohol during pregnancy can be made easier for couples if they work out a shared goal. As well encouraging each other, this can help both partners stick to their commitment.

“It’s pretty important to be open and honest with each other. Express your reasons for choosing to go alcohol-free, and try to think about any challenges that may come up. It’s important to talk about what can happen and how you’ll deal with someone offering you an alcoholic drink when you’re out.

“It can also help to talk to a healthcare professional together and explore the support and resources available. It’s important to remind yourselves of the reasons for your choice.”

Sharing her own experience is one way Lauren hopes to normalise going alcohol-free when trying for a baby and during pregnancy.

“I think sharing your own story can resonate with people around you and even empower them to make the decision not to drink,” she said. “I didn’t eat deli meats, sushi, or pre-made salads because we’re told to steer clear of these things, as I did. The message to avoid alcohol is just as important.”

*In the coming months, we’ll be regularly sharing stories like Lauren’s on our website.*[*Sign up to the FARE email list*](https://fare.org.au/action/)*to receive similar stories.*

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