

Nicole Richie

BACK ON BOOZE



Nicole, escorted by Joel Madden at private house party Jan. 25, at all her weight constantly

An addict is an addict

NEW MOM RISKS BABY'S HEALTH & **TOTAL RELAPSE**

IN a frightening relapse, new mom Nicole Richie has fallen off the wagon, sources tell The ENQUIRER exclusively.

And now Nicole's friends fear that she is risking her newborn baby's health.

The troubled "Simple Life" star was spotted drinking white wine at a Los Angeles hotel just a few weeks after giving birth to baby Harlow.

"Nicole is playing with fire," a friend of the 26-year-old star told The ENQUIRER.

"Less than a year ago, when she first got pregnant, she was in rehab battling her long-term substance abuse addictions.

"It's a slippery slope for her to be already boozing — and the fact that she's breast-feeding Harlow makes it especially alarming."

Harlow's father, 28-year-old Good Charlotte rocker Joel Madden, and Nicole were spotted Jan. 29 having drinks at the Chateau Marmont hotel.

"Nicole downed two glasses of white wine in a short period of time — and almost as soon as she finished the first glass, she ordered a second one," revealed an eyewitness.

"IT WAS SHOCKING — ESPECIALLY knowing her druggie past and that she just had a baby."

Nicole has long battled alcohol problems, in addition to an eating disorder. But it was her longtime use of both illegal and prescription drugs — she took an estimated 73,000 pills in four years — that kept her in and out of rehab.

Last May, when she realized she was pregnant, Nicole once again entered rehab to treat her drug abuse. The ENQUIRER broke the story last year of Nicole's surprise pregnancy and rehab.

"Nicole may think that she can get away with drinking wine because it isn't her drug of choice, but she's tempting fate," said her friend.

Experts agree Nicole's alcohol relapse is an extremely dangerous turn of events.

"THE AMOUNT OF DAMAGE TO THE BABY is directly related to the amount of alcohol she is drinking," said Dr. Cheryl Perlis, a Chicago-based obstetrician.

"Very little alcohol gets into the breast milk if a new mom drinks moderately. But if she drinks heavily, the baby can suffer from sleep deprivation and developmental problems.

"It appears that if she is drinking, she has relapsed," said the expert, who did not treat the star. "An addict is an addict."

Dr. Lester Silver — a leading alcohol and addiction specialist in New York — agrees it is nearly impossible for a recovering alcoholic to return to controlled drinking.

"I've been treating alcoholics since 1985, and have never seen a case of a person who has been treated for alcohol addiction going back to social drinking. We always recommend total abstinence."

Obstetrician Natchez Morice of Morgan City, La., said: "We tell new mothers who are breast-feeding to wait at least two to three hours after a glass of wine to allow the liver to metabolize the alcohol so it won't be passed on to the infant.

"But a recovering addict would probably have more than one glass of wine, which would put her baby at risk for sleep problems, irritability, and possible developmental problems down the line."

Nicole's publicist denies she's been drinking recently, but the star's friend added: "I'm very scared for Nicole."

by **ROBIN MIZRAHI** and **LYNN ALLISON**



Nicole was spotted chugging wine at the Chateau Marmont hotel