

What is Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS)?

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome is a specific medical diagnosis used to describe an individual with permanent brain damage, physical birth defects and growth deficiencies resulting from prenatal exposure to alcohol. There are other diagnostic terms that are used to describe individuals with some, but not all of these characteristics.

What is Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)?

A woman who drinks alcohol during pregnancy risks giving birth to a child with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). FASD is the umbrella term used to describe a range of defects and disabilities that are caused by prenatal exposure to alcohol. This may include some, but not all of those listed above. For example, a person with FASD may have developmental delays, but none of the physical characteristics of FAS.

How much alcohol is safe to drink while pregnant?

Currently there is no research to indicate how much alcohol is safe. It is best not to drink any alcohol while pregnant. All alcoholic drinks are harmful – a mixed drink, a wine cooler, a glass of wine or a bottle of beer – all contain alcohol.

When is it safe to drink alcohol while pregnant?

While most of the baby's organs develop during the first and second trimesters, brain development continues throughout pregnancy and even after birth. Exposure to alcohol at any time in the pregnancy can affect the baby's brain. Therefore, it is safest not to drink any alcohol throughout pregnancy. In fact, it is best to stop drinking before pregnancy.

What happens if a woman drinks alcohol while pregnant?

When a pregnant woman drinks an alcoholic beverage, the alcohol is quickly absorbed into her bloodstream and passes through the placenta directly to the developing baby. Because of the baby's size and its developing system, the alcohol can be more harmful to the baby than to the mother.

What kind of harm can alcohol do to an unborn baby?

Children with FASD can suffer from:

- learning disabilities
- hyperactivity
- attention or memory deficits
- difficulty managing anger
- poor judgement
- difficulties with problem solving

These challenges may lead to others later in life, such as crime, unemployment, homelessness or alcohol and drug abuse.

Can FASD be corrected?

Unfortunately, babies born with FASD do not grow out of it, nor can it be corrected. However, there are many resources available to support families affected by prenatal exposure to alcohol. Call Motherisk at 1-877-FAS-INFO (1-877-327-4636) or visit www.ccsa.ca to access the Canadian Centre for Substance Abuse National Directory of Services related to FASD.

Where can I learn more about alcohol and pregnancy?

To learn more about alcohol and pregnancy talk to your health care provider or visit www.alcoholfreepregnancy.ca.