

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders

Pregnancy can be an exciting time for a woman. However, drinking alcohol while pregnant can have devastating effects. Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders, or FASD, is a term that describes the range of effects that can occur in a person whose mother drank alcohol while pregnant. Effects of alcohol use during pregnancy include physical and mental disabilities and problems with behavior and learning. People born with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) often have problems with learning, problem solving, attention spans, memory, hearing, and speech. Those born with FASD are at high risk for trouble in school and with the law, alcohol and drug use, and mental health disorders.

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) is a Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. Children who do not have all of the symptoms of FAS can have another Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. Studies by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have shown that there are 0.2 to 1.5 cases of FAS for every 1,000 live births in the United States. Other Studies have estimated the rate of FAS at 0.5 to 2.0 cases per 1,000 live births.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) lists the following outcomes of drinking alcohol while pregnant:

- Birth Defects of the heart, brain, and other major organs
- Developmental Disabilities
- Problems in how a person looks, grows, thinks, and acts
- Fetal Death

According to the CDC, children with FAS have a distinct pattern of facial characteristics such as a thin upper lip, small eye openings, and a small philtrum (the groove running vertically between the nose and lips). Babies born with FAS are often underweight and small. Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders last a lifetime. There is no cure for them. Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders are preventable if a woman does not consume alcohol during pregnancy.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have found that 1 in 12 pregnant women reports alcohol use in the United States. One in 30 pregnant women report binge drinking (having five or more drinks at one time). Alcohol use can harm a baby at any time during a pregnancy. It can cause problems in early pregnancy, even before a woman knows she is pregnant. The CDC reports that all drinks with alcohol can harm an unborn baby. A 12-ounce can of beer has as much alcohol as a 4-ounce glass of wine or a 1-ounce shot of liquor. Some drinks, such as malt beverages, wine coolers, and mixed drinks, have more alcohol than a 12-ounce can of beer.

According to the National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, there are many women who do not realize the dangers drinking poses for their babies. Women with alcohol addiction may have a very difficult time breaking their cycle of addiction. The National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome suggests that partners, friends and families can support these pregnant women in many ways:

- Help plan strategies to make it easier to stop or cut back on drinking
- Do fun things together that do not involve alcohol
- Encourage the use of alternative, nonalcoholic beverages
- Encourage her to follow up with her health care provider.
- Be within a phone call if she needs support.
- Do not be judgmental or critical; this can hurt your relationship.

For more information, visit these web sites:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,

<http://www.kidshealth.org/parent/medical/brain/fas.html>

Kids Health, <http://www.kidshealth.org/parent/medical/brain/fas.html>

Medline Plus, <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/fetalalcoholsyndrome.html>

National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, <http://www.nofas.org/>