

Alcohol Use in Pregnancy

There is no known safe amount of alcohol use during pregnancy or while trying to get pregnant. There is also no safe time during pregnancy to drink. All types of alcohol are equally harmful, including all wines and beer. When a pregnant woman drinks alcohol, so does her baby.

Women also should not drink alcohol if they are sexually active and do not use effective contraception (birth control). This is because a woman might get pregnant and expose her baby to alcohol before she knows she is pregnant. Nearly half of all pregnancies in the United States are unplanned. Most women will not know they are pregnant for up to 4 to 6 weeks.

FASDs are completely preventable if a woman does not drink alcohol during pregnancy. Why take the risk?

Why Alcohol is Dangerous

Alcohol in the mother's blood passes to the baby through the umbilical cord. Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can cause miscarriage, stillbirth, and a range of lifelong physical, behavioral, and intellectual disabilities. These disabilities are known as fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASDs). Children with FASDs might have the following characteristics and behaviors:

- Abnormal facial features, such as a smooth ridge between the nose and upper lip (this ridge is called the philtrum)
- Small head size
- Shorter-than-average height
- Low body weight
- Poor coordination
- Hyperactive behavior

- Difficulty with attention
- Poor memory
- Difficulty in school (especially with math)
- Learning disabilities
- Speech and language delays
- Intellectual disability or low IQ
- Poor reasoning and judgment skills
- Sleep and sucking problems as a baby
- Vision or hearing problems
- Problems with the heart, kidney, or bones

How Much Alcohol is Dangerous

There is no known safe amount of alcohol to drink while pregnant.

When Alcohol is Dangerous

There is no safe time to drink alcohol during pregnancy. Alcohol can cause problems for the developing baby throughout pregnancy, including before a woman knows she is pregnant. Drinking alcohol in the first three months of pregnancy can cause the baby to have abnormal facial features. Growth and central nervous system problems (e.g., low birthweight, behavioral problems) can occur from drinking alcohol anytime during pregnancy. The baby's brain is developing throughout pregnancy and can be affected by exposure to alcohol at any time.

If a woman is drinking alcohol during pregnancy, it is never too late to stop. The sooner a woman stops drinking, the better it will be for both her baby and herself.

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/fasd/alcohol-use.html>



Understanding the Behaviors of Children and Adolescents with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD)



Individuals with FASD often talk better than they think. They can "talk the talk", but can't "walk the walk".

Won't ...or Can't?

Without an understanding of the physical, behavioral and cognitive challenges faced by people with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD), typical misbehaviors can be misinterpreted as willful misconduct or deliberate disobedience, when it is often just the opposite.

Information Processing Differences.

Due to the brain damage caused by prenatal alcohol exposure, people with FASD have difficulty with the following:

- Input or taking in information
- Integration of new information with previous learning
- Output, or ability to use information

Individuals prenatally exposed to alcohol have difficulty with:

- **Abstract Reasoning** - Abstract concepts are the invisible foundation that structures our world.
- **Cause and Effect Reasoning** - Consequences often do not shape future behavior. People with FASD often don't use past experiences to help make future decisions.
- **Generalization** - They don't have moveable parts in the thinking process; so, when you change a piece of the routine for the individual, you have created an entirely new routine.
- **Time** - Telling time, feeling the passage of time, associating specific activities to numbers on a clock, cyclical nature of events.
- **Memory** - Especially short-term and auditory.
- **Behavior** - Difficulty with socialization and skills of independence.

Secondary Characteristics.

FASD is a lifelong disability, but often "secondary characteristics" occur, which are the result of living with the struggles of the primary disability:

- Fatigue, tantrums
- Irritability, frustration, anger, aggression
- Fear, anxiety, avoidance, withdrawal, shutdown, lying, running away
- Trouble at home and/or school
- Legal trouble, drug/alcohol abuse
- Mental health problems

The impact of these secondary conditions can be reduced when parents and professionals understand the intellectual challenges associated with an individual's history of prenatal exposure to alcohol.

Caregivers should adjust their expectations of the person with FASD to the developmental stage they are at. Expect variability.

Behavioral Expectations

Typical 5 year-olds...

- Go to school
- Follow 3-part instructions
- Cooperatively play
- Share and take turns

5 year-old with FASD, developmentally 2 years...

- Take naps
- Follow one instruction
- Sit still for 5-10 minutes
- Parallel play
- "My way or no way"

Typical 10 year olds...

- Answer abstract questions
- Get along with others, solve problems
- Learn inferentially
- Physical stamina

10 year-old with FASD, developmentally 6 years...

- Learn by doing, experientially
- Mirror and echo words, behaviors
- Supervised play, structured play
- Easily fatigued by mental work

Typical 18 year-olds...

- On the verge of independence
- Maintain a job and graduate from school
- Have a plan for life
- Budget own money

18 year-old with FASD, developmentally 10 years...

- Need structure and guidance
- Limited choices of activities
- In the "here and now," little future focus
- Giggles, curiosity, frustration
- Get an allowance
- gets organized with help of adults

FASD AWARENESS DAY

September 9

(THIS DATE, 9/9, IS A REMINDER OF THE 9 MONTHS WHEN PREGNANT WOMEN ARE TO ABSTAIN FROM THE USE OF ALCOHOL)



FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDERS

and their lifelong impacts are totally preventable IF the mother-to-be does not consume alcohol



Minnesota Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome • www.mofas.org • 1-866-90-MOFAS (66327)