

# Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders

## What is Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders?

Also known as FASD, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders is an umbrella term for a group of disorders associated with the effects of drinking alcohol during pregnancy. This spectrum of disorders includes: FAS (Fetal Alcohol Syndrome), ARND (Alcohol-Related Neurodevelopmental Disorder), ARBD (Alcohol-Related Birth Defects) and FAE (Fetal Alcohol Effects). Depending on the amount and type of exposure during pregnancy, the fetus may have varying types of damage to the nervous system and physical abnormalities. FASD may cause abnormal facial features, such as a smooth ridge between the nose and upper lip (philtrum), small head size, shorter height, low body weight, poor coordination, hyperactive behavior, difficulty paying attention, poor memory, difficulty in school, learning disabilities, speech and language delays, intellectual disability or low IQ, poor reasoning and judgment skills, vision or hearing problems, problems with the heart, kidney, or bones.



## What causes FASD?



When a woman drinks during her pregnancy alcohol is able to pass through the placenta and into the umbilical cord of the fetus, the same way a baby is able to absorb nutrients and grow throughout the pregnancy. While the first trimester is considered the most dangerous time to consume alcohol due to the early development of the nervous system and other organs, damage can occur at any time in the pregnancy.

## Doctors sometimes advice women that occasional drinking is safe. Is an occasional glass of wine really going to make a difference?

Many studies show that even a small amount of alcohol can have effects on the child and that there is no documented safe time or amount of alcohol to consume during a pregnancy. 12oz of beer, 1oz of liquor (1 shot), 1 bottle of wine cooler (Alcopop) or 4oz of wine all contain the same amount of alcohol. Not every child will show signs of being effected by alcohol exposure, however, a better question to consider is: Why take the risk at all?



## I've already been drinking and I'm pregnant. What should I do?

Stop now. The sooner you stop consuming alcohol, the better the outcome your child will have. Also, speak with your doctor about any concerns you have to improve the outcomes for your child. If you have an alcohol abuse problem and need help to stop drinking, talk to your doctor or call the Family Health Line at 1-800-328-3838.



## Is FASD treatable?



There is *no cure* for FASD, however early treatment and diagnosis can help improve the outcomes for many children. Early intervention and individualized education can help improve some of the symptoms and behavior problems associated with children diagnosed with FASD later in life such as staying behind or finishing school, not holding a job, not living independently, or ending up in the criminal justice system. If you suspect your child or unborn baby may be affected by alcohol exposure during pregnancy seek assistance from your doctor now to improve their outcome.

## How prevalent is FASD?

As of 2010, it is estimated that 1 in 13 pregnant women self-report drinking during their pregnancy. While this number is lower than previous years, there is still room for improvement. And pregnant women with the highest estimates of reported alcohol use were 35-44 years-old, white, college graduates and employed. It is still estimated that 40,000 babies are born with FASD every year, with many cases still unaccounted for.



## Is FASD preventable?



Yes, in fact it is 100% preventable if women are careful and choose NOT to drink while pregnant, planning to become pregnant, or are sexually active and not using a form of birth control. There is no safe time, amount, or type of alcohol to consume while pregnant.

You can find out more about Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders by visiting [www.AlcoholFreePregnancyNJ.com](http://www.AlcoholFreePregnancyNJ.com)