

Alcohol & Pregnancy

What is FASD and do I need to worry about it?

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a term that describes a range of disabilities that may affect people whose mothers drank alcohol while they were pregnant. People with FASD may be small, they may have behaviour and/or learning problems, and their faces may look different. **Anyone** can have FASD if their biological mother drank alcohol during pregnancy.

Did you know?

If women drink when they are pregnant, their babies may have brain **and nervous system** damage. This means that as they grow up, **those affected** may have many problems with learning and /or behaviour, doing math, thinking things through, learning from experience, understanding the consequences of their actions, and remembering things. They may also have trouble in social situations, and getting along with others.

How much drinking causes FASD?

Alcohol may cause brain **and nervous system** damage in the developing baby. **There is no safe amount of alcohol during pregnancy.** There may be no safe **time** to drink alcohol during pregnancy.

We know that a baby's brain is very sensitive to alcohol while it is developing, but we don't know how much alcohol it takes to do this damage. Research shows that children born to mothers who drank as little as 1 drink per day during pregnancy may have behaviour and learning problems.⁰ Binge drinking – or drinking a large amount of alcohol in a short amount of time - is especially bad for the developing baby.

Stopping or cutting down drinking alcohol while pregnant will help ensure a healthy baby. No alcohol is the best (and the safest!) choice for having a healthy baby.

If you are planning a pregnancy or not using reliable birth control, avoid alcohol. Remember that friends, family and community members can all support a pregnant woman not to drink during pregnancy!

What type of alcohol should I avoid?

Everything! Beer, wine, cocktails, coolers, hard liquors such as whiskey, gin or vodka, liqueurs or even hard ciders all contain alcohol that can hurt your developing baby. There is **no safe type** of alcohol to drink when you are pregnant.

But I enjoy the occasional drink.....!

Replace your occasional drink with a non-alcoholic beverage. If you need help to stop drinking, get it as soon as possible and ask your partner and family to support your decision to quit. There

⁰1.Sood B, Delaney-Black V, Covington C, Nordstrom-Klee B, Ager J, Templin T, Janisse J, Martier S, Sokol RJ. Prenatal alcohol exposure and childhood behavior at age 6 to 7 years: I. dose-response effect. Pediatrics. 2001 Aug;108(2):E34.

is help and support is available. Talk to your doctor, community health nurse, midwife or other health care provider. Check with your public health unit, community resource or Friendship Centre - they might have programs that could help.

For additional information:

Public Health Agency of Canada's FASD Initiative

http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/dca-dea/programs-mes/fas-fae_main_e.html

FASD - First Nations and Inuit

http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fnihb/cp/fas_fae/index.htm

Canadian Health Network - A consumer health information service brought to you by the Public Health Agency of Canada and major health organizations across Canada.

www.canadian-health-network.ca

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Can FASD be cured?

Unfortunately, FASD cannot be cured. People have FASD for their entire life. However, people with FASD can still do very well with helpful supports and services. Some examples include special education, vocational programs, tutors, structured environments (e.g. classrooms), and lifelong care.

2. Can biological fathers cause FASD?

No. FASD can only be caused when a mother drinks alcohol during pregnancy and the baby is exposed to alcohol before it is born. However, it is known that women with partners who drink are more likely to drink themselves during pregnancy, so a big role for future fathers is to support the woman's choice not to drink when they are having a baby.

3. What do people with FASD need?

Because of their disabilities, people who are affected by alcohol use before they were born may have special needs for support regarding: learning how to pay attention, handling money, learning from experiences, understanding the consequences of behaviour, interacting with other people, keeping friends, and keeping a job.

Without the help and support, people who are affected with FASD may develop mental health problems, have trouble with the law, drop out of school (or be disruptive in the classroom), **become homeless**, and/or may develop drug and alcohol problems themselves. People with FASD often need care throughout their entire lives.