



A health series to educate families on well-being issues with their children

A collaborative effort of Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC and The Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center



UPMC

What is Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)?

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What Is Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)?

- Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a general term for the conditions that occur in babies who were exposed to alcohol in the womb
- One particular condition due to alcohol exposure in the womb is Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS)
- FAS is a pattern of physical, behavioral, and cognitive problems in a child due to a mother drinking during pregnancy



What Are Some Symptoms of FAS?

There are many ways that alcohol can hurt a developing infant. Here are some examples.

- Physical:
 - Abnormal facial features
 - Poor growth (height and weight)
- Behavior:
 - Hyperactivity
 - Bad attention span
- Cognitive:
 - Intellectual disability
 - Memory problems
 - Learning disabilities
 - Speech delays





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What is FASD?

How Is Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Diagnosed?

A doctor can diagnose a child with FAS if the child has the following three findings:

1. Three particular face abnormalities;
2. Growth problems;
3. Problems with the brain: this could be a problem with the way that the brain is made or a problem with thinking.

The bad effects of alcohol use on a child are not always obvious at first. Sometimes it takes years to figure out how a child has been affected by alcohol exposure in the womb.

Is there a safe amount of alcohol or a safe time to drink alcohol during pregnancy?

No. Many scientific studies have proven that alcohol is a poison (teratogen) to developing babies. Alcohol interferes with many aspects of the development of the baby.

Maternal alcohol use during pregnancy is one of the biggest causes of intellectual disability in the world.

Treatment of FAS:

- Early diagnosis is difficult in some cases, but is ideal in order to allow children to have therapies as young as possible. Education of caretakers is very important so that the child can get help as young as possible.
- There is no cure for FAS. The best thing is prevention, and this means NO alcohol during pregnancy.
- It is important for a child with suspected or definite FAS to go to all of their well-child checks. This way, the pediatrician can pick up subtle signs and symptoms of FAS, and to make sure that the child is growing and developing well.





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What is FASD?

Treatment of FAS (continued):

- Referring a child with suspected or definite FAS to Early Intervention/Alliance for Infants.
- Depending on the types of problems that FAS has caused in a child, some kids will require medications to manage FAS symptoms. Examples of these medicines are stimulants (such as Ritalin) for concentration problems, or anti-depressants to treat a mood disorder that has resulted from FAS.
- It is also important for children to have counseling, behavioral therapy, and/or tutoring. Some children with FAS need special learning plans (also called Individual Education Plans, or IEPs).

Content Sources:

National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. "Frequently Asked Questions." <http://www.nofas.org/faqs>.

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