

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders

FACT SHEET

What are fetal alcohol spectrum disorders?

Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASDs) is the name given to a group of conditions that a person can have if that person's mother drank alcohol while she was pregnant. These conditions include physical and intellectual disabilities, as well as problems with behavior and learning. Often, a person has a mix of these problems. FASDs are a leading known cause of intellectual disability and birth defects.

What causes FASDs and how can they be prevented?

FASDs are caused by a woman's drinking alcohol while she is pregnant. There is no known amount of alcohol that is safe to drink while pregnant. All drinks that contain alcohol can harm an unborn baby. There is no safe time to drink during pregnancy. Alcohol can harm a baby at any time during pregnancy. So, to prevent FASDs, a woman should not drink alcohol while she is pregnant, or even when she might get pregnant. FASDs are 100% preventable. If a woman doesn't drink alcohol while she is pregnant, her child will not have an FASD.

What are some signs of FASDs?

Signs of FASDs can be physical or intellectual. That means they can affect the mind or the body, or both. Because FASDs make up a group of disorders, people with FASDs can show a wide range and mix of signs.

Physical signs of FASDs can include abnormal facial features such as narrow eye openings and a smooth philtrum (the ridge between the upper lip and nose), small head size, short stature, and low body weight.

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Rarely, problems with the heart, kidneys, bones, or hearing might be present.

Intellectual and behavioral signs of FASDs might include problems with memory, judgment or impulse control, motor skills, academics (especially in math), paying attention, and low IQ. Specific learning disabilities are also possible.

What can I do if I think my child has an FASD?

Talk to your child's doctor or nurse. If you or the doctor thinks there could be a problem, ask to see a specialist (someone who knows about FASDs) such as a developmental pediatrician, child psychologist, or clinical geneticist. In some cities, there are clinics whose staffs have special training in recognizing and dealing with children with FASDs. Also contact your local early intervention agency (for children younger than 3 years of age) or local public school (for children 3 years of age or older). To find out who to call, contact the National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities at www.nichcy.org/states.htm or by calling **1-800-695-0285**.

To learn more about FASDs, go to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/fas, or the National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome at www.nofas.org.

To help your child reach his or her full potential, it is very important to get help for FASDs as early as possible!



Learn the Signs. Act Early.