

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome – The Shocking Statistics!

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An expectant mother consuming alcohol during pregnancy puts her newborn baby at extremely high risk of devastating harm. The potential effects of fetal alcohol exposure include disabling brain damage and birth defects. From these terrible impacts are many severe complications a child may suffer throughout his or her lifetime. Affliction with one or more of these serious medical effects is called Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS).

Here's just one example of many alarming research findings regarding FAS: A report from the National Academy of Medicine to the U.S. Congress states, "Of all the substances of abuse, including cocaine, heroin, and marijuana, alcohol produces by far the most serious neurobehavioral effects in the fetus."

The health consequences of prenatal alcohol exposure vary from one newborn baby to the next. What does *not* vary is the permanence of their severe medical conditions. The mental and physical defects caused by FAS are incurable.

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Staggering Statistics on Pregnancy and Alcohol Abuse

A disturbing percentage of U.S. American women consume alcohol while pregnant. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports research indicating that:

- Over 10% of pregnant women ages 18-44 in the country have consumed alcohol during their pregnancy, within the 30 days prior to the survey.
- The most troubling statistic is the 3.1% of pregnant women who report that they engage in binge drinking. That means consuming at least 4 alcoholic beverages at one time.
- These disastrous statistics help account for the high incidence of FAS year after year. In the U.S., an average of 2 infants per 1,000 births have FAS.
- In Hawaii, for example, a state with around 18,500 births per year, approximately 185 babies are diagnosed with FAS!

Is It Safe to Drink a Small Amount During Pregnancy?

Exposure to any amount of alcohol is unsafe for a developing fetus. Even a small quantity of alcohol passes directly from the mother to the baby in the womb. A developing baby does not have a fully formed liver, so it cannot process alcohol.

Alcohol consumption is dangerous in all three trimesters of pregnancy because the brain continues to grow and develop throughout all the gestation phases. At any point during pregnancy, the presence of alcohol puts a baby at extreme risk.

How Does Drinking Alcohol Cause Fetal Damage?

During the earliest weeks of pregnancy, a fetus's brain, heart, and cardiovascular system start developing, even before a woman may discover she is pregnant. Here's what causes fetal alcohol syndrome when you drink alcohol during this critical period of fetal formation and subsequent weeks of pregnancy:

- The alcohol you drink goes into your bloodstream, crosses the placenta, and reaches the developing fetus.
- The blood alcohol concentration in the developing baby escalates and becomes higher than in the mother's body because a fetus cannot metabolize alcohol at the rate that an adult does.
- Alcohol impedes oxygen and nutrients from efficient delivery to the fetus.
- During the first trimester, when the fetus is in its most critical stages of formation, exposure to alcohol impacts the development of tissues and major organs, damages the brain, distorts facial development, and causes deformities of other body parts.
- The brain continues developing and the body continues growing throughout pregnancy, so alcohol intake during the later trimesters further escalates the risk of more and worse brain damage and other major birth defects.

Symptoms of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

The number, kinds, and severity of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome symptoms vary between infant victims. Some children experience much worse effects than others. Any combination of the signs and symptoms of fetal alcohol syndrome listed below are possible:

Fetal alcohol syndrome face:

- Extremely thin upper lip
- Undersized eye openings
- A short and upward-turned nose
- Underdeveloped groove between the nose and upper lip

Defects of the body:

- Deformities of arms, legs, fingers, and joints
- Retarded physical growth (both prenatal and postnatal)
- Central nervous system conditions
- Vision and/or hearing disabilities
- Undersized head and brain
- Defects of the heart, bones, lungs, and kidneys

Developmental disorders and intellectual disabilities:

- Cognitive impairment
- Attention-deficit
- Hyperactivity
- Language deficit
- Memory issues
- Difficulty processing information
- Reasoning difficulties
- Restlessness or hyperactivity
- Rapid mood changes

Behavioral and social problems:

- Problems with behavior and impulse control
- Coordination problems
- Difficulty with the basics of daily functioning
- Poor coping ability
- Problems with school performance
- Poor social skills
- Difficulty adapting to change
- Weak concept of time
- Difficulty staying on task
- Trouble switching between tasks
- Difficulty in connecting choices to consequences
- Trouble with planning or thinking in terms of a goal

When You Should See a Doctor for FAS?

If you're planning to have a baby or are already pregnant but feel you cannot stop drinking, seek help urgently! Talk to your primary care doctor, obstetrician, or mental health professional without delay. Don't wait for potentially devastating consequences to your baby before seeking the critical help you need immediately.

If you think your child may have Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, discuss your concerns with your pediatrician as soon as possible. Tell the doctor you drank alcohol during your pregnancy and discuss any symptoms your child has been having. The pediatrician will perform a medical examination and determine whether your child is experiencing Fetal Alcohol Syndrome effects.

Having an early diagnosis might lead to therapeutic solutions that can help with some learning and behavioral difficulties for your child. Additionally, family counseling can help alleviate some of the frustration of coping with the daily practical and emotional challenges of providing for the special needs of a child with FAS.

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Treatment

There is no specific treatment for Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and no cure for the mental handicaps and physical abnormalities caused by fetal alcohol exposure. But, early medical intervention may help ease some of the symptoms children with FAS endure.

Medications may help alleviate some effects. Various therapies may help improve walking, speech, learning, social skills, and behavioral problems, and other issues. There also may be medical treatments that can help with heart defects and vision problems. Special school programs, life skills coaching, and vocational training may also help.

Additionally, family therapy can often help parents and siblings cope with a child's FAS-related behavioral problems and challenging physical needs.

If You are Worried About FAS, Seek Help Now!

If you are drinking while pregnant, or while planning to become pregnant, or if a loved one is in jeopardy of giving birth to a baby with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, you must reach out promptly for professional help.

Renaissance addiction recovery specialists will help you overcome the underlying issue that led to alcohol addiction, instead of just focusing on stopping alcohol abuse habits. We work with you on a one-on-one basis to create a fully personalized plan for your recovery program.

If you're pregnant and need help to stop drinking, call Renaissance Recovery Center, Gilbert AZ at (480) 418-0716, or contact us online to start addiction recovery and protect your pregnancy.

