

## Disability Awareness Begins With You



### Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

*Fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) is the name given to a group of physical and mental birth defects caused by a woman drinking heavily during pregnancy.*

- FAS is characterized by abnormal facial features, growth retardation, and central nervous system problems. Children with FAS may have problems with learning, memory, attention span, problem solving, speech, and hearing. They can also have problems in school and problems getting along with their friends.
- FAS is an irreversible, lifelong condition that affects every aspect of a child's life and the lives of the child's family; however, FAS is 100% **preventable** - if a woman does not drink alcohol while she is pregnant.
- If a pregnant woman drinks alcohol but her child does not have all the symptoms of FAS, it is possible that her child may be born with alcohol-related neurodevelopmental disabilities (ARND). Children with ARND may demonstrate learning and behavioral problems caused by prenatal exposure to alcohol.

*There is no safe amount of alcohol that a woman can drink while pregnant.*

- When a pregnant woman drinks alcohol, so does her fetus, because alcohol crosses the placenta freely. There is no safe dose of alcohol in pregnancy, and there does not appear to be a safe period during pregnancy for drinking.
- All drinks containing alcohol can hurt an unborn baby. A standard 12-ounce can of beer has the same amount of alcohol as a 4-ounce glass of wine or a 1-ounce shot of straight liquor. In addition, some alcoholic drinks, such as malt beverages, wine coolers, and mixed drinks often contain more alcohol than a 12-ounce can of beer.
- If a pregnant woman does drink, it is never too late for her to stop. The sooner a pregnant woman stops drinking, the better it will be for both her and her baby.
- There is no cure for FAS; however, with

early identification and diagnosis, children with FAS can receive services that can help increase their potential.

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National Center for Environmental Health, CDC*

### Preventing Secondary Conditions in Children with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

*More than 2000 U.S. babies are born each year with fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS). More than twice that number are born with alcohol-related neurodevelopmental disorder (ARND).*

- FAS is a disorder characterized by growth retardation, facial abnormalities, and central nervous system dysfunction. FAS is caused by a woman's use of alcohol during pregnancy.
  - FAS is a lifelong condition that affects every aspect of a child's life and the lives of his or her family.
  - Children with ARND do not have full FAS but demonstrate learning and behavioral problems caused by prenatal exposure to alcohol.
  - Children with FAS are at very high risk for psychiatric problems, criminal behavior, unemployment, and incomplete education. Few people with FAS lead independent lives.
  - Lifetime costs are estimated to be \$1.4 million for each child with FAS.
  - To date, interventions appropriate for children with FAS have not been developed and validated through scientific investigation.
- CDC is developing activities related to preventing secondary conditions in children who have FAS.*
- CDC funded the University of Washington to examine secondary conditions in individuals with FAS, and funded Emory University to document the needs of and resources available to families and children with FAS.
  - CDC convened meetings of professionals, researchers, and intervention specialists to identify research needs for developing a model intervention for children with FAS; CDC also met with parents of children with FAS to hear their unique concerns and suggestions.
  - CDC is currently encouraging the application of knowledge gained from studies

of other disabilities that lead to impairments similar to those of FAS to interventions for children with FAS; CDC is working to develop and test these interventions in clinical studies of children with FAS.

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Web site <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/programs/cddh/fashome.htm>*

### ADULTS 18 and OVER Parents report that their adult children with FAS/E are:

- Moral Chameleons
- Often exhausted and irritable from uneven sleep patterns
- Extremely vulnerable to anti-social behavior and at greater risk for finding the structure and supervision they need in the criminal justice system
- Unlikely to follow safety rules concerning fire hazards, safe meal preparation, vehicle operation, infectious diseases, basic life needs, etc.
- Notably lacking in the ability to manage money.
- Volatile if pushed too far to do something they see as unreasonable, such as asking them for money to pay their rent or groceries.
- Quite vulnerable to co-dependent relationships which all too often turn violent.
- Incapable of taking daily medications or birth control pills on a regular and effective basis.
- Vulnerable to panic attacks, depression, suicide, mental and emotional overload, and sometimes psychotic breaks.
- Very impaired as to entertaining themselves and keeping out of mischief when left alone.
- Not nearly as capable as they appear to be.
- In desperate need of appropriate supported employment opportunities.

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