

Frequently Asked Questions

Could a person have FAS or FAE and not know it?

Yes. Not even all doctors recognize and diagnose these birth defects. The most obvious symptoms of FAS and FAE are often the behavioral ones, and people don't always consider a prenatal cause. Many people who have gotten the diagnosis say they knew that something was not right, but no one had ever been able to help them figure out what was wrong.

Can babies be born drunk, just like some babies exposed to drugs are born experiencing withdrawal?

If a mother has been drinking heavily just before having her baby, there will be alcohol in the baby's blood just as in the mother's. If the mother is drunk, the fetus will be drunk. Babies of mothers who have been drinking regularly will often go through withdrawal after birth. After birth, a baby can also get alcohol through its mother's breast milk if she is breast-feeding, but not enough to get drunk.

Does hard liquor cause more damage to the fetus than beer or wine?

All types of alcohol can cause the same type of damage. The alcohol in a glass of wine, a beer or a wine cooler is the same as the alcohol in a shot of hard liquor like gin, whiskey or vodka. Typically a can of beer, a glass of wine and a shot of liquor each contain about 0.5 ounces of alcohol.

Does drinking by the father affect the fetus?

There has not been enough research on the effects of alcohol, tobacco and drugs on a man's sperm, so we don't know what the biological affect on the fetus might be. What happens after that, though, is not yet understood. We do know that it is helpful for a man not to drink around a woman who is trying not to drink. By sharing the healthy lifestyle choice, a man is really helping his partner have a healthier baby.

Are children with FAS and FAE more at risk for becoming alcoholics?

Research has shown that people whose parents were alcoholics are at a higher risk of becoming alcoholics than people whose parents were not alcoholics. If a person with FAS or FAE had parents who were alcoholics, then they would be at a greater risk themselves.

How will I know if I am at risk for becoming an alcoholic?

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services says "When family members (parents, grandparents, aunts/uncle), guardians or other adults in charge of children are alcoholic, there is strong evidence that children in these families are more likely to develop the disease of alcoholism as well. The fact is, alcoholism tends to run in families." There are also other indicators for alcoholism including community, school, individual and peer risk factors.

Can FAS or FAE be passed on from generation to generation?

As far as researchers know at this time, FAS and FAE cannot be genetically passed on from generation to generation. There is some research that shows that alcoholism is more common in some families than others. That may be a factor in more than one generation having FAS or FAE in their families.

How do we know that alcohol caused a person's problems instead of something else?

If a person has FAS, we know that alcohol caused the FAS. For people who don't have all the signs of FAS, it is harder to tell if their problems were caused by prenatal exposure to alcohol or something else. It is common for some problems, like learning disabilities, to have several causes like genetics, poor living environment, and drug or alcohol exposure during pregnancy. Sometimes a doctor has to make the best judgment he or she can, and might say that a person has possible fetal alcohol effects.

Is it OK for a woman to drink only during special occasions when she is pregnant?

Since there is no KNOWN safe amount of alcohol to drink during pregnancy, the best choice is not to drink at all, even during special occasions. Many people use sparkling cider or non-alcoholic wines as a substitute at special occasions where adults are drinking. Remember that it is illegal for people who are under-aged to drink alcohol.

Is there any safe amount of alcohol a pregnant woman can drink?

There is no KNOWN safe amount of alcohol a pregnant woman can drink and not risk damaging her baby.

Can alcohol damage a baby at any stage of its development, including times before a woman might realize that she is pregnant?

Yes.

Should a woman worry if she drank before she knew she was pregnant? What should she do?

Regardless of the stage of pregnancy, a woman improves the chances of having a healthy baby if she stops drinking. Although there may be reason to worry, if drinking was heavy prior to recognizing the dangers, stopping the risky behavior is the best possible advice for the remainder of the pregnancy. If a woman cannot stop drinking, get help. For additional information, see a listing of organizations under "Agencies You May Wish to Contact".

Do the effects of FAS and FAE last a person's entire lifetime?

The brain damage caused by prenatal alcohol exposure **DOES** last a person's lifetime. Sometimes the physical features become less obvious at puberty, as the child becomes a teenager.

Could I know someone with FAS or FAE?

It is possible that you may know someone with FAS or FAE, but without the diagnosis of a doctor it would be very hard to say for certain. For example, the physical features characteristic of children with FAS must be carefully considered by a physician and determined to fall within a designated range. The behavioral problems associated with FAS and FAE are often the most obvious symptoms of the underlying birth defect, yet these can also result from causes other than drinking during pregnancy. Regardless of the diagnosis, it is important to treat **all** of our fellow students with respect, kindness and dignity.

Do I have an alcohol-related birth defect?

This is an issue that you will need to discuss with your parent or guardian. A diagnosis of an alcohol-related birth defect requires an evaluation by a physician trained to recognize these types of birth defects. A positive diagnosis can result in identifying the special needs of such individuals and the resources available to more effectively teach and train them for productive and successful lives.

Why would a woman drink while she is pregnant?

There can be a variety of reasons why a woman would drink while pregnant ranging from ignorance of the risks of alcohol-related birth defects, to social pressures, to alcohol addiction, itself. What can you do? Tell her why it is important to stop drinking and encourage her to do so. If she has trouble stopping, tell her about the local organizations that can help her quit.

***Modified from "The Fabulous F.A.S. Quiz Show," The March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation and the Washington State Department of Health.**