

the babies most at risk are those whose mothers take more than 5-6 drinks a day.

Heavy drinkers (10 drinks per week) were more than twice as likely as light drinkers (5 drinks per week) to have a low birth-weight baby.

Even one "binge" (5 or more drinks at one time) during the most critical period, the early weeks after conception and **before you may be aware that you are pregnant**, can cause your baby to suffer some FAS symptoms.

NOW, IT'S OVER TO YOU!

For your baby's good health, and your own, why not decide to give up alcohol during your pregnancy—and perhaps for good?

FINALLY, A WORD TO FATHERS

You also have an important role to play in ensuring that your child is healthy.

There are two points to consider:

- According to Australian expert in alcohol-related brain damage, Dr Jean Lemane, alcohol drunk **by the father** up to three months before conception may also lead to birth abnormalities.
- When your wife decides to avoid alcoholic liquor, it is important that you respect her decision and give her your support.



Frontal photograph of an infant with FAS (the same child at 2 years).

Bibliography

Medical Journals

Canadian Journal of Public Health,
July-Aug 1994
Canadian Medical Association Journal
July 15, 1991 (2 articles)
Lancet, June 2, 1973
Lancet, March 26, 1983
Lancet, April 10, 1993
Medical Journal of Australia, Oct 17, 1994
Obstetrics & Gynaecology (NY), May 1983

Book

Hafen (BO & Frandeen, NJ)
Fetal Alcohol Syndrome
Hazeldean Foundation, USA, 1980

Lectures delivered in Melbourne, May 1995, by

- Ann Streissguth, PhD, USA, world authority and leading researcher on FAS and FAE.
- Dr Jean Lemane, MB, ChB, FRACP, DPM, Sydney.

Revised 2000
WCTU DRUG FREE LIFESTYLES
1st Floor, 15 Collins Street
Melbourne 3000
Phone (03) 9654 6491 Fax (03) 9650 2890

An important
message to

PARENTS-to-be,
especially **Mothers**



Foetal Alcohol Syndrome

If you are planning a pregnancy or are already pregnant, you will want to give your baby the best possible start to life. You will be aware that drugs you take could harm your baby, and so will be careful to take only medication prescribed by your doctor. **However, one drug that you may not have considered is alcohol.**

IMPORTANT FACTS

Alcohol drunk by a mother crosses the placenta and enters the bloodstream of her baby. **If the mother is drunk, so is the baby.**

As the foetal liver is not mature until the latter half of pregnancy, most of the alcohol that reaches the foetus is retained there until the mother's liver has eliminated her alcohol. It then passes back to her bloodstream for elimination.

Alcohol is a poison as well as an addictive drug, so alcohol in the foetus has a toxic effect on developing cells and organs, especially the brain where it kills cells.

The greatest damage occurs during the first three months when major morphological (structural) abnormalities occur.

From the fourth to the sixth months alcohol continues to affect the central nervous system and increases the risk of miscarriage.

In the last three months, alcohol contributes to dulled mental abilities, minor abnormalities and decreased growth.



Frontal photograph of an infant with FAS (at birth).

The damage to a developing foetus resulting from the mother's alcohol intake is known as **FOETAL ALCOHOL SYNDROME (FAS)** or, where symptoms are less severe, as **FOETAL ALCOHOL EFFECTS (FAE).**

A BABY SUFFERING FROM COMPLETE OR PARTIAL FAS WILL SHOW SOME OF THESE FEATURES:

- Prenatal and postnatal growth retardation
- Evidence of central nervous system damage:
 - mental retardation
 - poor sucking and swallowing reflexes, apathy, eating problems
 - poor muscle tone and motor coordination
 - irritability
- Craniofacial abnormalities:
 - microcephaly (small head)
 - a flattened groove between the upper lip and nose
 - a small, upturned nose
 - a broad, low, nasal bridge

- small, slant-like eyes set wide apart with heavily-folded eyelids
- a small jaw
- a cleft palate
- protruding, often imperfect ears
- eye problems
- thicker than normal facial hair

- **Skeletal abnormalities:**
 - painful immobility of elbows and knees
 - small or abnormal fingernails and toenails
 - abnormal creases on hands
- **Defects in major organs:**
 - heart, liver, kidneys, genitals

FAS is now the leading cause of mental retardation in the Western world and is a preventable tragedy. Although there are changes in some features of the syndrome with time, most affected children can still be identified as suffering from FAS in late childhood and adolescence, and there is no significant improvement in intelligence with time.

BABIES AT RISK

The incidence of FAS is estimated at 1-2 per 1000 live births, whereas the less serious diagnosis of FAE is estimated to occur in 3-5 per 1000 live births. Dr Ann Streissguth, a leading authority on FAS in the US, also believes that about 1 child per 100 has subtle learning and behavioural problems related to the mother's alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

No "safe" dose of alcohol consumption during pregnancy has been established. For this reason, the US Surgeon-General and the British Royal College of Psychiatrists have adopted a play-it-safe policy and **uncompromisingly advise total abstinence from alcohol during pregnancy.** Studies in Britain and the USA show that