

PREVENT FETAL ALCOHOL SYNDROME

**There is no safe time or amount to drink
during pregnancy!**

Alcohol is an agent that causes birth defects (a teratogen). Teratogens have four effects:

- Death (including stillbirth, spontaneous abortion, miscarriage, and death shortly after birth) because the baby is malformed internally
- Severe malformation such as heart defects, cleft-lip and palate, hip displacement, club foot (some of these malformations are treatable)
- Growth deficiency (born smaller and abnormal development)
- Functional deficits – caused by brain disruption, which is the main source of the damage, and one that cannot be corrected

Ways alcohol causes damage in the developing foetus:

- *Excessive cell death* – normally cells grow and die in the developing brain, but alcohol causes an excessive amount of cell death
- *Impaired cell proliferation* – alcohol interferes with normal cell development, which includes growth and division
- *Disruption of cell migrational pattern* – alcohol causes errors to occur in brain development so that a cell that has a particular place to go in the brain may migrate to the wrong location
- *Inhibited nerve growth* – alcohol disrupts the neurotransmitters so messages are unable to get from one area to another

There are times when the foetus is not as susceptible as others. Some women seem not to be as sensitive to alcohol and some foetuses are resistant to the alcohol's effects. But since none of these factors are predictable, the only safe course for the pregnant woman is to refrain from drinking.

Since the central nervous system – which includes the brain – is developing throughout the entire pregnancy, this underlines the fact that there is no safe time or amount to drink during pregnancy.

In the first 3 months of foetal development ... alcohol causes physical damage

In the 2nd trimester ... alcohol increases the risk of spontaneous abortion

And in the last trimester ... alcohol can cause growth deficiency

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Studies of FAS children have shown the following results: Poor sucking skills; poor sleep and wake patterns; crying and trembling; neurotransmission delayed; arithmetic is their hardest subject; these children need help with daily living skills – socialization, adaptive behaviour and communication.

Alcohol produces dysfunctional families; adults have no goal in life; they have difficulty holding a job; teens experience disruptive school experiences; adults are suicidal; more than 90% FAS individuals have mental health problems.

WHAT IS THE COMMUNITY SOLUTION?

IPIP – Intervention, Prevention, Intervention, Prevention

Each community needs to intervene with high-risk mothers to prevent more alcohol-affected babies. Further, the community needs to intervene with high-risk babies to prevent secondary disabilities.

To solve the problem of alcohol-affected babies women must either be motivated not to drink during pregnancy or, if they can't stop drinking, to avoid pregnancy.

The five P's of prevention are:

- 1. *Public Awareness***
- 2. *Professional education***
- 3. *Provide service from birth to age 3***
- 4. *Public policy (everyone can become involved)***
- 5. *Parent Power (support groups are important)***

We need communities totally committed to not having any more FAS babies! Continual awareness is required through public service announcements, posted signs about the danger of drinking during pregnancy, and other educational endeavours.

This is the message. FAS is only a small part of alcohol-related disabilities.

FAS lasts a lifetime,

BUT –

FAS is preventable.

This is a condensed version of the WCTU Signal Press brochure with title of the same name written by Ann P. Streissguth, PH.D.