

# Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD)



## What Is it?

**Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASDs)** refer to physical, behavioral, and cognitive impairments that occur in a fetus exposed to alcohol before birth. These conditions can affect each person in a variety of different ways, and vary in severity. They may appear at any time during childhood.

## What Causes FASDs To Develop?

FASDs develop due to **prenatal alcohol exposure**. This occurs when a person consumes alcohol during their pregnancy. The alcohol enters the mother's bloodstream and is passed to the fetus through the umbilical cord. Alcohol can disrupt fetal development at any stage, even before the woman is aware of her pregnancy.

Research shows that heavy drinking by the mother places the developing fetus at a higher risk for developing a severe impairment. However, even smaller quantities of alcohol can cause harm to the fetus. All types of alcohol are harmful, including wine and beer.

**There is no known safe amount of alcohol consumption during a pregnancy or while trying to become pregnant.**

## What Can Be Done To Prevent FASDs?

FASDs are entirely preventable. Women who are pregnant, attempting to conceive, or who suspect they may be pregnant should avoid drinking any amount of alcohol. This is because a woman can become pregnant and not know for up to 4 to 6 weeks.

It is never too late to stop drinking alcohol during pregnancy. The brain develops throughout the entire pregnancy, and stopping alcohol use will improve the fetus's health and well-being.

- Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASDs) are completely preventable if a woman does not drink alcohol during pregnancy.
- FASDs last a lifetime. There is no cure, but early treatment can improve the child's quality of life.
- Treatments for FASDs include medical care, medication, behavior and educational therapy, parent training and alternative approaches.

## Signs and Symptoms of FASDs

A person with an FASD might have:

Behavioral Issues	Learning Challenges	Physical Problems
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hyperactive behavior</li><li>• Difficulty with attention</li><li>• Poor reasoning and judgment skills</li><li>• Difficulty controlling emotions and impulsivity</li><li>• Symptoms of depression and anxiety</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Poor memory</li><li>• Learning disabilities</li><li>• Speech and language delays</li><li>• Intellectual disability or low IQ</li><li>• Difficulty in school, especially with math</li><li>• Understanding and following directions</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Low body weight</li><li>• Poor coordination</li><li>• Problems with the heart, kidneys, or bones</li><li>• Shorter-than-average height</li><li>• Vision or hearing problems</li><li>• Sleep and sucking problems as a baby</li><li>• Distinctive facial features</li></ul>



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## What Are The Types of FASDs?

Different FASD diagnoses are based on particular symptoms and include:

- **Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS):** FAS represents the most severe form of an FASD, aside from fetal death. A person with FAS has central nervous system (CNS) problems, minor facial differences and growth issues. They may have difficulties with attention, memory, communication, learning, vision and/or hearing. Individuals with FAS often struggle with school and with their relationships.
- **Partial Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (pFAS):** this diagnosis is given when a person does not meet the full diagnostic criteria for FAS, but has a history of prenatal alcohol exposure, some facial differences, growth abnormalities, or CNS issues.
- **Alcohol-Related Neurodevelopmental Disorder (ARND):** a person with ARND may have intellectual disabilities and problems with behavior and learning. They may struggle in school, especially with math, memory, learning, judgment, and have poor impulse control.
- **Alcohol-Related Birth Defects (ARBD):** a person with ARBD may have problems with their hearing, bones, kidneys and/or heart.
- **Neurobehavioral Disorder Associated With Prenatal Alcohol Exposure (ND-PAE):** a person with ND-PAE will have problems with learning and memory, behavior issues, and difficulties with day-to-day living.

## Treatment

**FASDs last a lifetime and there is no cure.** However, early identification of FASD is critical for the well-being of individuals affected by prenatal alcohol exposure and their families. It can help with the effectiveness of treatment, and help individuals build a supportive network with others affected by FASD.

Protective factors can help reduce the effects of FASDs and assist people with these conditions to reach their full potential. These protective factors include:

- Early Diagnosis
- Special Education and Social Services Involvement
- Loving, Nurturing, and Stable Home Environment
- Absence of Violence in Household

## Types of Treatment

- Medical Care
- Medication
- Behavior and Education Therapy
- Parent Training
- Alternative Approaches

To learn more about treatment options for FASDs, please go to [Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders: Types of Treatment page](#) on the CDC's website.

## Get Help!

If you suspect a problem, ask your healthcare provider for a referral to a FASD specialist. This could be a developmental pediatrician, a clinical geneticist or a child psychologist. In some cities, there are clinics with special training in diagnosing and treating children with FASDs. Call your state's public early intervention program to request a free evaluation to find out if your child qualifies for intervention services. You do not need to wait for a doctor's referral or medical diagnosis to make this call. Where to call for a free evaluation from the state depends on your child's age.

## National Resources

### FASD United

<https://fasdunited.org/>

## Connecticut Resources

If your child is younger than 3 years old, contact:

Connecticut Birth to Three System  
800.505.7000  
[www.birth23.org/](http://www.birth23.org/)

If your child is 3 years old or older, contact your local public school system. Even if your child is not old enough for school or enrolled in public school, call your local elementary school or board of education and ask to speak with someone who can help you have your child evaluated.



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