

FACTS *for* FAMILIES

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Drinking Alcohol in Pregnancy (Fetal Alcohol Effects)

According to the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology, pregnant women should not drink any form of alcohol. Pregnant women who think they have should be aware of the serious and negative effects of alcohol on the development of the baby (fetus). In the United States, prenatal exposure to alcohol is the most common cause of birth defects. Exposure to alcohol during pregnancy causes damage to the brain and affects the child's behavior, these effects can be prevented by 100 percent.

Thousands of children are born with the effects of prenatal exposure to alcohol. While many people drink, alcohol is poisonous to the child that grows inside the womb. The ingestion of even an alcoholic beverage per day during pregnancy the baby in development can be exposed to the risk of serious birth defects. A small amount of alcohol can cause permanent damage to the child. The use of alcohol during pregnancy can cause serious problems in children and adolescents:

- Infants may show slow growth and developmental delay, unusual facial features, irritability, brain and neurological disorders, mental retardation and problems with their attachment to their fathers.
- Kids and school-age children may have problems with learning, low tolerance for frustration, inadequate social boundaries and difficulty reading.
- Teenagers can have continuous learning problems, depression, anxiety and inappropriate sexual behavior.

Fetal Alcohol Problems (AFP) described the negative effects and problems caused by drinking alcohol while pregnant. Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (SFA) is a more specific group of symptoms caused by drinking alcohol while you are pregnant. A child is diagnosed with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (SFA) when there is a prenatal exposure to alcohol and has:

- Facial deformities.
- Slow and retarded development.
- Brain and neurological problems.

Children who are suspected of SFA must be carefully evaluated by a pediatrician, child and adolescent psychiatrist or other clinical experience. Fetal alcohol exposure is often overlooked as the cause of the problems in the child's behavior. The effects of alcohol on the developing brain during pregnancy are not reversible. However, early intervention can reduce the severity of the disability and improve the chances of success for the child.

Drinking Alcohol in Pregnancy, "Facts for Families," No. 93 (12/11)

The early intervention for EAF or SFA includes occupational therapy, special education and speech therapy evaluations.

If you are pregnant and find that it is impossible to stop drinking, talk with your obstetrician to help stop. It is important to get treatment to stop drinking as soon as possible. There are programs available either inpatient, outpatient and residential. Local programs (for example, "12-step program" of Alcoholics Anonymous) can provide support to quit drinking.

For further information see *Facts for Families*:

- # 3 Teens: Alcohol and Other Drugs
- # 17 Children of Alcoholics
- # 23 Children who are Mentally Retarded
- # 31 When Teens are Sons
- # 41 How to Choose a Treatment for Substance Abuse
- # 45 The Children's Exposure to Lead

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