

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

What is it: Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders are a group of birth defects that can happen when a pregnant woman drinks alcohol. Fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) is the most severe type of the disorder.

Who is at risk: Any infant of a mother that drank any amount of alcohol during her pregnancy.

Cause: In the womb, a baby doesn't have a fully developed liver that can process alcohol, so it can easily get to and damage the baby's organs.

Some of the most severe problems happen when a pregnant woman drinks in the first trimester, when the baby's brain starts to develop. But the second and third trimesters aren't safe either. The brain is still developing then, and fetal growth can be interrupted by even moderate amounts of alcohol.

Symptoms and Diagnosis: To diagnose FAS, doctors look for unusual facial features, lower-than-average height and/or weight, small head size, problems with attention and hyperactivity, and poor coordination. They also try to find out whether the mother drank while she was pregnant and if so, how much.

Complications: (1) neurocognitive impairments, (2) self-regulatory challenges, and (3) impairments in adaptive functioning.

Home Treatment: Therapy can help with behavior and educational problems. Parents can also get training to help their child.

Medicines can help manage symptoms like hyperactivity, inability to focus, or anxiety. A child with fetal alcohol syndrome needs to be watched closely to see if their treatment needs to be adjusted.

Did you know? FAS is the leading known cause of mental retardation, fetal alcohol syndrome or fetal alcohol syndrome disorder is associated with persistent physical and neurodevelopmental abnormalities, and fetal alcohol syndrome disorder crosses all socioeconomic groups and affects all races and ethnicities

http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/sites/default/files/ARNDConferenceConsensusStatementBooklet_Complete.pdf

<http://www.webmd.com/baby/fetal-alcohol-syndrome>

<http://emedicine.medscape.com/article/974016-overview>