

FETAL ALCOHOL SYNDROME

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THINK TWICE!
ARE YOU SURE THAT DRINK IS WORTH IT?



The Fitzroy Valley of Western Australia research provided data on the number of people affected by FASD. The “Lililwan” project found that 120 out of every 1000 children are affected with physical features and neurodevelopment impairment which are due to foetal alcohol syndrome (FAS)

<http://www.recovery.org/topics/fetal-alcohol-syndrome/>

What exactly is FAS (Fetal Alcohol Syndrome)?

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome is a type of disorder in a child which is caused due to the mother consuming alcohol during pregnancy. The effect of alcohol in the body is quite rapid and it can spread during the earliest stages of pregnancy or even before a woman realizes that she is pregnant.

FASD (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders) is an umbrella term for various types of similar diagnosis. One of which is considered the most extreme includes Fetal Alcohol Syndrome.

According to the guidelines from the “American Academy of Pediatrics” consumption of alcohol at any given period during pregnancy would be extremely harmful for the fetus.



<http://cdn2.momjunction.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/10th-month.jpg>

Researchers also indicate that there is no appropriate amount of alcohol to drink when a woman is pregnant. The right perspective to have when it comes to drinks is “Prevention is better than cure”.



<http://www.teemingbrain.com/glasses-empty-and-full/>

It was also found that drinking alcohol during the first trimester makes the most impact to the fetes however it is not advisable by doctors to consume alcohol at any given trimester.

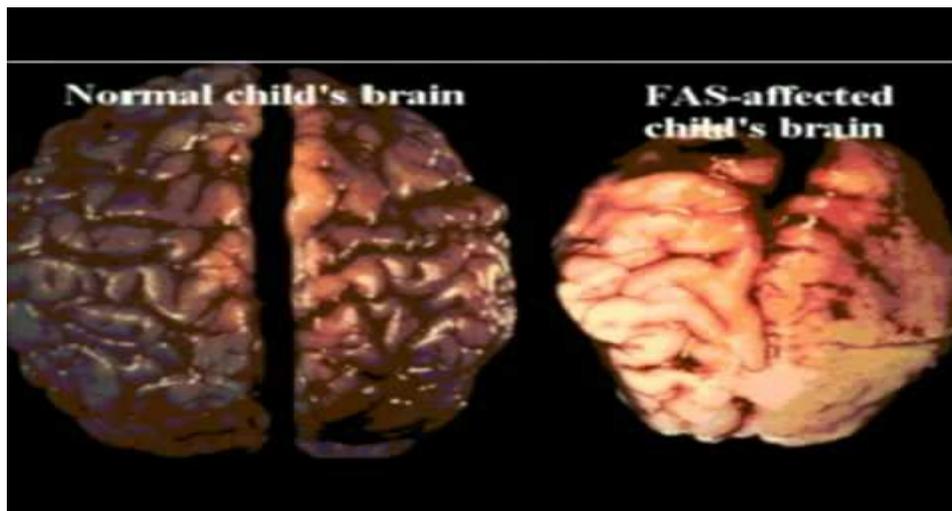
Prior rigorous research which was conducted on primates prove that certain newborns have a specific gene which are more likely to develop the symptoms of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome.

The cost of FAS:

It has been calculated that it costs \$2 million over a person’s life with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome in the year, 2002. Ten years later, the Australian Parliament expressed its concern on increasing the awareness of FASD in Australia although further work must be done in preventing, identifying and managing FASD. It also recommended that placing health warnings on alcoholic beverages can be one of the methods to increase awareness.

The causes of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

There are two major developments that is caused by alcohol on the baby's growth. Firstly, there will be an increase of alcohol in the higher blood concentration in the developing baby compared to the adult as the Fetus metabolizes alcohol at a slow rate. Secondly, the consumption of oxygen and nutrition which are passed on to the baby is disturbed and, it affects the brain, organs and tissues.



<http://healththerapy.org/fetal-alcohol-syndrome/>

The risk factors of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

Research indicates that there are underlying factors that links to Fetal Alcohol Syndrome.

The first factor signifies a maternal factor. Through rigorous statistics collected, it has been shown that the female population in the current generation have an accelerating rate of alcohol consumption and the rate has been increasing drastically. In addition to that, a study conducted on drinking during pregnancy by The Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology (August 1998) categorized women into groups of who were more likely to drink during pregnancy. The research implies groups of: college educated women, unmarried women, employed or students, annual household income of above \$50,000 and smokers.

The second factor implies a paternal factor as men also play a major part in impacting the health of their offspring by consumption of certain drugs such as tobacco and alcohol as it enters to the testicles which as a result will decrease a male's sperm count and reduce it's motility. In conjunction to that, if men reduce or stop their alcohol consumption during the pregnancy period, the women are more likely not to be tempted to alcohol.

Other risk factors include alcohol consumption leading to malnutrition as it gives a rise to metabolic disturbance to the fetus. It interferes with the baby's digestion, absorption, urinary excretion which would lead directly to "Spina bifida" that will cause a birth defect in which the closing of the backbone and membranes around the spinal cord is incomplete.

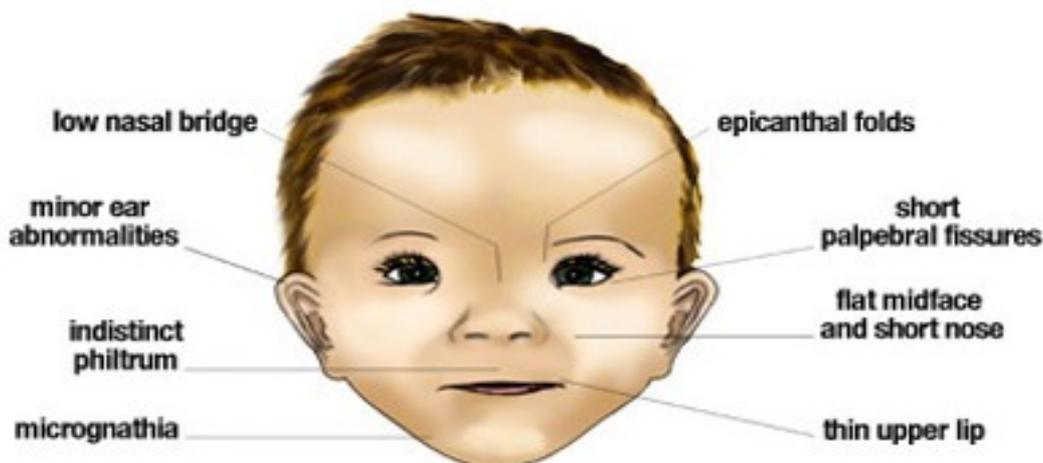
Signs and symptoms

Facial features:

- Small teeth and upper jaw (micrognathia)
- Flat cheeks
- A narrow eye opening
- Short, upturned nose
- Widely spaced eyes
- Crossed eyes
- Smooth or flat area between the nose and lips

Hearing disorders involved:

- Delayed auditory function
- Sensorineural hearing loss
- Intermittent conductive hearing loss
- Central hearing loss



Mental implications:

- Loss of intellectual function
- Behaviour disorders
- Learning disabilities
- Social impairment
- Coordination impairment
- Speech and language disorders
- Memory impairment
- Mental retardation
- Extreme anxiety and nervousness
- Short attention span
- Irritability and hyperactivity

Physical features:

- A low birth weight
- Short neck
- Large ears
- Joint and bone abnormalities



<https://www.healthrising.org/chronic-fatigue-syndrome-mecfs-doctor-resource-center/ask-mecfs-fibromyalgia-expert-panel/diagnosis-4/>

Diagnosis

In diagnosing whether the baby has been affected with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, the doctors would consider the following factors:

- The abnormal facial features
- Any sign of growth problems
- Implications in the central nervous system which divides into three categories: Structural, Neurologic and functional.
- Mother's alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

Aside from the common factors, the doctors may also assess other aspects such as the cognitive ability and language development, health issues as well as social and behaviour problems.

Treatment Programs

Scientists are still looking for a permanent cure for Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. However, if early interventions are put in place, it would be the best recommendation for this moment. Due to a various causes, symptoms and risk factors that arises from Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, the child would have to look for the medical specialists in coping with their implications. The most recommended specialists include: Paediatrician.

Primary care provider, audiologist, immunologist and mental health professionals.

Some medications that are used to manage Fetal Alcohol Syndrome involves stimulants, anti-depressants, neuroleptics and anti-anxiety drugs.



<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/health/9367001/Safety-warning-over-Britains-most-common-antidepressant.html>
<http://roguehealthandfitness.com/antidepressants-are-placebos/>

An important measure that must be taken is to look out for ways to help the child cope with the birth defects and functions by providing proper therapy, occupational therapy or providing special education.

Prevention programs

There are three broad strategies that were assigned which reduced the alcohol-related harm in indigenous communities:

- Supply reduction strategies which involves the common method of increasing the price of alcohol, decreasing the number of places which could sell alcohol and restrict certain trading hours.
- Demand reduction strategies which provide early interventions or alternatives.
- Most importantly, the harm-reduction strategies which involve community patrols being on guard.

Questions and Answers

1. How much alcohol is reasonably acceptable to drink without harming a developing child?

The official recommendation from the guidelines of The Department of Health and National Institute for Health and Care Excellence implies that it would be best to avoid alcohol completely during pregnancy to be on the safe side.

2. Does drinking during breast feeding affect the baby?

Yes, it would affect the baby as the concentration of alcohol that moves to the blood stream transfers from the blood stream into the breast milk. However, research indicates time would lower the concentration but it is still not advisable.

3. What should a parent/guardian do if he/she suspects the child has FAS?

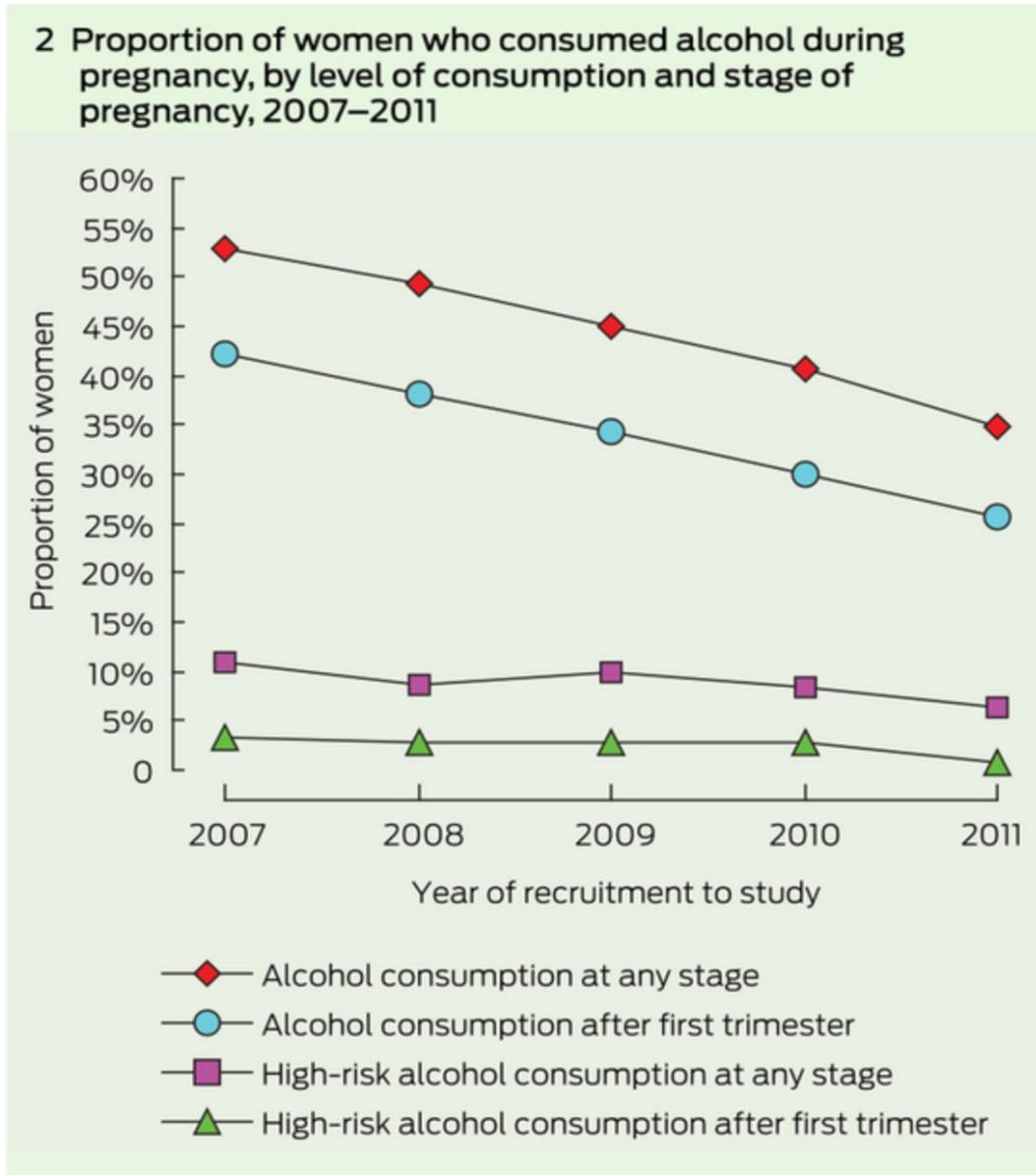
It would be advisable to take the child for a diagnosis test and to carry out certain tests which are necessary just to be sure.

4. What if the women have an alcohol addiction and wants to get pregnant?

It would be recommended if the women stop or reduce her alcohol intake before taking any further steps to pregnancy. There are various ways on reducing or stopping alcohol consume from alcoholics such as:

- Support groups
- Family therapy
- Individual or group counselling
- Educating the person about the harmful effects caused by alcohol

5. What are the latest statistics of people diagnosed with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome in Australia?



Cameron CM, Davey TM, Kendall E, Wilson A, McClure RJ. Changes in alcohol consumption in pregnant Australian women between 2007 and 2011. *Medical Journal of Australia*. 2013;199(5):355-7

The Medical Journal of Australia showed statistics of women who consumed alcohol during pregnancy during 2007-2011. Research shows that there are approximately 40% of unplanned pregnancies and it takes about a couple of months for a woman to be aware that she is pregnant. This was one of the most common causes in increasing the probability of the child to develop a Fetal Alcohol Syndrome.

Reference:

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/fetal-alcohol-syndrome/basics/definition/con-20021015>

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<http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/health-news/this-is-how-much-you-can-drink-while-pregnant-9844644.html>

<https://www.breastfeeding.asn.au/bf-info/safe-when-breastfeeding/alcohol-and-breastfeeding>

<http://drugabuse.com/library/how-to-help-an-alcoholic/>

<http://fasglobalhealth.weebly.com/blog>