



What Everyone Should Know about FASD

Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASDs) are a group of conditions that can occur in a person exposed to alcohol before birth. These neurodevelopmental conditions can affect each person in different ways. People with FASDs can have lifelong effects, including challenges with behavior and learning as well as physical problems.¹ Individuals with FASD also show a wide range of strengths.²



FASDs are described as a spectrum because prenatal alcohol exposure affects each person differently. Every individual has a unique combination of strengths, challenges, and support needs, so no two people with FASD have the same experience.



1 in 20 children in the US has an FASD.³



There is **no known safe amount**, **no safe time**, and **no safe type of alcohol** to consume during pregnancy. Not all babies will be affected by prenatal alcohol exposure. However, it is impossible to know which babies will be affected or what the specific effects will be.⁴

If you had alcohol while you were pregnant, even before you knew you were pregnant, talk with your child's healthcare provider as soon as possible. They can help check for any effects that might appear over time and connect you with resources and supports. Families affected by FASD can thrive!

FASD Across the Lifespan

Prenatal alcohol exposure can affect how the brain and body develop, with lifelong impacts.⁵ This can include things like: physical health concerns, developmental delays, behavioral challenges, difficulty with school or employment, mental health struggles, and more.⁶ Symptoms and support needs can change throughout the lifespan.⁷ Every person with FASD is impacted differently and has both unique strengths and support needs.⁸



There are 428 identified co-occurring conditions associated with FASD, including conditions like ADHD, cardiovascular and gastrointestinal problems, and anxiety disorders.⁹ Congenital heart defects (CHDs) are 5 times as common among children with FASD than those without FASD.¹⁰



Many behaviors associated with FASD are often misunderstood as intentional defiance or misbehavior. Instead, it is recommended to consider an FASD-informed approach that recognizes brain-based differences and focuses on understanding support needs rather than assuming intentional behavior.

Learn about FASD directly from people with FASD: scan the QR code for the "Glimpses of FASD" series.



Sources

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2025). About fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASDs). <https://www.cdc.gov/fasd/about/index.html>
2. Flannigan, K., Wrath, A., Ritter, C., McLachlan, K., Harding, K. D., Campbell, A., Reid, D., & Pei, J. (2021). Balancing the story of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder: A narrative review of the literature on strengths. *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*, 45, 2448–2464.
3. Thomas, S.A., Gosdin, L.K., Terplan, M., Kim, S.Y., & Deputy N.P. (2026). Alcohol consumption during pregnancy among women aged 18–49 Years — United States, 2021–2024. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep*, 75:280–284.
4. CDC. (2026). About alcohol use during pregnancy. <https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol-pregnancy/about/index.html>
5. Reid, N., Dawe, S., Shelton, P., Hammett, P., Warner, J., Armstrong, E., LeGros, K., & O'Callaghan, S. Systematic Review of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Interventions Across the Life Span. *Alcohol. Clin. Exp. Res.* 2015, 39, 2283–2295.
6. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. (2025). Understanding fetal alcohol spectrum disorders. <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures-and-fact-sheets/understanding-fetal-alcohol-spectrum-disorders>
7. Hyland, M.T., Courchesne-Krak, N.S., Sobolewski, C.M., Zambrano, C., Mattson, S.N. (2023). Neuropsychological outcomes in FASD across the lifespan. In: Abdul-Rahman, O.A., Petrenko, C.L.M. (eds) *Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders*. Springer, Cham.
8. Rutman, D. (2016). *Becoming FASD Informed: Strengthening Practice and Programs Working with Women with FASD*. Substance abuse : research and treatment, 10(Suppl 1), 13–20.
9. Attell, B. K., Snyder, A. B., Coles, C., & Kable, J. (2025). Comorbidities associated with fetal alcohol spectrum disorders in the United States. *Scientific reports*, 15(1), 29704.
10. Dorsey, A. N., Downing, K. F., Deputy, N. P., Weber, M. K., & Howards, P. P. (2025). Prevalence of congenital heart defects among children with and without diagnosed fetal alcohol spectrum disorders, 2016–2022. *Drug and alcohol dependence*, 274, 112790.

Published 7/2026