

Fact Sheet: Pregnancy & Alcohol

- **No amount of alcohol is known to be safe to drink during pregnancy:**
 - **All** alcoholic drinks can harm a fetus.
 - When drinking alcohol while pregnant, alcohol enters a woman's blood and reaches the fetus through the placenta. It is broken down much more slowly, and the alcohol level in the baby's blood is higher and remains elevated longer than in the mother's blood.
 - Drinking alcohol can hurt an unborn child's developing brain or cause mental and behavioral defects **at any time** during pregnancy.
 - Damage from high levels of alcohol consumption affects a child for a lifetime.

➤ **A standard drink is:**



- **Moderate Drinkers (7-10 drinks per wk) & Light Drinkers (1-3 drinks per wk):**
 - Children of mothers who drink moderately during pregnancy may be small for their age and have learning and behavioral problems.
 - The risk of miscarriage is double the normal rate in women who have 2-4 drinks per week.
 - Light and moderate drinkers may have babies with lowered attention spans (Attention Deficit Disorder), slow reaction times, and lower IQ scores.
 - Two drinks per week is associated with low birth weight.
- **Heavy Drinkers (2 or more a day):**
 - 30-45% of alcoholic women have children with severe Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.
 - Heavy drinkers are 3 times more likely to have a miscarriage than nondrinkers.
- **Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FADS) is a series of birth defects that last a lifetime – most recognized condition is Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS):**
 - Slower growth of fetus and/or smaller size at birth
 - Smaller size in childhood and adulthood.
 - Small head, small eyes, cleft palate, short nose, flattened forehead.
 - Mental retardation, learning and developmental problems.
 - Serious behavioral problems
 - Attention deficits
 - Speech and hearing problems
 - Physical deformities
 - Heart and kidney defects

⊗ When a child has a few of these problems at a mild level, it is called Fetal Alcohol Effects (FAE): the effects of FAE are also life-long. Other conditions include Alcohol-Related Birth Defects (ARBD), Alcohol-Related Neurodevelopmental Disorder (ARND) and Partial FAS (pFAS).

➤ ***Leading cause of mental retardation is 100% preventable:***

- More than 50,000 babies are born with alcohol-related damage each year.
- FASD costs the U.S. approximately \$4 billion per year.
- Not caused by biological father's alcohol use.
- Of all substances abused, alcohol produces by far the most serious neurobehavioral effects in the fetus (*1996 IOM Report to Congress*)

- Studies have found that the breastfed babies of women who had one or more drinks a day were slower in acquiring motor skills (such as crawling and walking) than babies who had not been exposed to alcohol (March of Dimes 3/07).

➤ ***Resources used to produce this Fact Sheet:***

<http://www.dsf.health.state.pa.us/health/site/default.asp>

Department of Health

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

<http://fascenter.samhsa.gov>

➤ ***Additional Resources:***

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Diagnostic and Prevention Network

<http://depts.washington.edu/fasdpn>

National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

<http://www.nofas.org>

National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/fas>

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information

800-729-6686

www.health.org

National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence

800-NCA-CALL (800-622-2255)

www.ncadd.org

National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

800-66-NOFAS (800-666-6327)

www.nofas.org

Where can a woman get help in stopping drinking?

Some women find it difficult to stop drinking. These organizations can help:

- [Alcoholics Anonymous \(AA\)](#)
Local chapters are listed in the white pages of local phone books.
- 1-800-ALCOHOL (1-800-252-6465)
A national help and referral line for people affected by alcohol and drug abuse.
- [The National Council on Alcoholism](#)
1-800-NCA-CALL (1-800-622-2255)