

FOETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER (FASD)

What Is Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)?



Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is the result of the harmful effects of prenatal alcohol exposure on the developing fetus. Alcohol is a teratogen, a toxic substance that can potentially cause a baby in the womb to develop abnormally.

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) advises that the safest option for women who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy is to avoid drinking alcohol. **There is no known safe amount of alcohol or safe time to drink alcohol during pregnancy.**

The guide to the diagnosis of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) was published in 2016 and addresses the under-recognition of FASD and provides health professionals with access to internationally validated diagnostic criteria as well as information about where to refer for diagnosis or treatment.

FASD is an umbrella term for a range of neurodevelopmental and physical abnormalities and may occur with or without facial abnormalities.

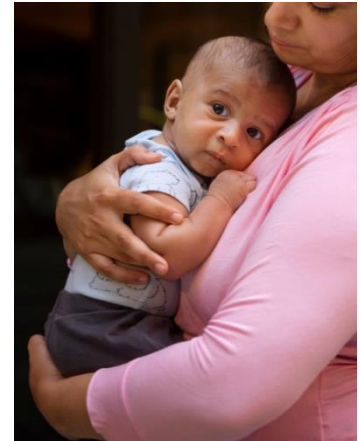


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There are ten domains of neurodevelopment related to different brain functions known to be affected by prenatal alcohol exposure.

These domains are:

- Brain structure/neurology
- Motor skills
- Cognition
- Language
- Academic achievement
- Memory
- Attention
- Executive function, including impulse control and hyperactivity
- Affect regulation
- Adaptive behaviour, social skills or social communication.



A FASD diagnosis requires objective evidence of severe impairment of brain function in at least three of these ten specified neurodevelopmental domains.

FASD occurs in all parts of society where alcohol is consumed. It has lifelong consequences and is extremely costly to health, education, disability and justice systems. The personal costs to families living with FASD are enormous. Early recognition and early therapy can minimise the adverse outcomes often seen.

Many of the common physical characteristics associated with FASD occur during the six-week period in early pregnancy when a woman may not yet know she is pregnant. However, a spectrum of disorders can occur depending on the frequency, quantity and timing of alcohol exposure, genetic influences, maternal age and health and the use of other teratogens during the pregnancy. FASD is thought to be the most common cause of intellectual disability and birth defects in the Western world, and it results in lifelong challenges for children and young people with FASD and their families.

Adapted by Get into Neurodiversity for a global audience.

Source: Marninwarantikura Women's Resource Centre is proudly supported by the Australian Government.



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Of all the substances of abuse, including cocaine, heroin, and marijuana, alcohol produces, by far the most serious neurobehavioral effects in the fetus.

Stratton, Howe & Battaglia