

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a term that is used to describe a range of disabilities that result from exposure to alcohol during pregnancy. Prenatal exposure to alcohol is the leading cause of preventable birth defects and developmental delays in Canadian children. These can include brain damage, vision and hearing problems, slowed growth, and other birth defects. People with FASD are also at high risk of other disabilities, such as mental health issues; disrupted schooling; and alcohol and drug problems.

In Canada, estimates are that over 3000 babies are born with FASD every year. As individuals with FASD need lifelong support and direction, many parents – birth, foster and adoptive – are dedicating their lives to help individuals with FASD cope with the demands of daily life. Health, social, educational and justice system services are also involved.

Partners, families and friends can provide support to women during pregnancy in different ways. The Canadian FASD Research Network offers many suggestions, including:

- **Be a good host.** When entertaining or having a night out, offer non-alcoholic 'mocktail' beverages and avoid pressuring women to drink (pregnant or not).
- **Minimize harms.** Most of us don't drink on our own - our drinking habits are shaped by those around us. Support a 'culture of moderation' by looking at your own drinking and working to minimize any harmful effects that your drinking might have on yourself or others. Canada's Low Risk Drinking Guidelines are a good place to start (www.ccsa.ca).
- **Help change negative perceptions.** When talking about FASD and alcohol use during pregnancy, avoid being critical of women who do drink during pregnancy. Do not blame women for not caring about their babies or for being ignorant. This type of judgment creates a climate of fear and shame where women may avoid seeking help.
- **Support pregnant women no matter what.** Pregnancy can be a time of enormous pressure and scrutiny. Women receive advice and information from health care providers, websites, friends, family, and even random strangers. Respect the choices that women make. These choices are their personal attempt to keep themselves and their babies as healthy as they possibly can. It's never too late for a woman to stop drinking during pregnancy or to make other healthy changes in her life.

There is no safe amount or time to drink alcohol during pregnancy. If you did drink before knowing you were pregnant, know that you are not alone. Quitting now and looking after your own health are the best ways to reduce the risk of harm to your baby. Talk with your doctor and other healthcare providers to ensure you get the best care for you and your baby. If you need assistance to reduce your drinking during pregnancy, support is available through your local Addiction Services office.

If you would like to learn more about this topic, check out Western Health's Mental Health & Addiction Services website: www.westernhealth.nl.ca/mha.

If you need support, please your local contact **Mental Health & Addictions Office:**

Port aux Basques	695-6250
Burgeo	886-2185
Stephenville	643-8740
Corner Brook (Adult)	634-4506
Corner Brook (Children & Youth)	634-4171
Deer Lake	635-7830
Norris Point	458-2381
Port Saunders	861-9125

Or call:

Mental Health Crisis Line	1-888-737-4668
Kids Help Phone	1-800-668-6868
NL Health Line	1-888-709-2929

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