

# FAS in a Nutshell

Foetal alcohol Syndrome (FAS) is the leading known cause of mental retardation in western civilisation. (NIAA, Eighth Special Report NIH Publication No 94-3699)

Most individuals with FAS have normal intelligence.

FAS causes serious social and behavioural problems.

Each year in the UK 1 baby in every 500 born has FAS.

Ten times are born with alcohol related disorders.

**There is no known safe level of alcohol consumption during pregnancy.**

Alcohol causes more damage to a baby than any other drug.

**FASD related conditions are 100% Preventable.**

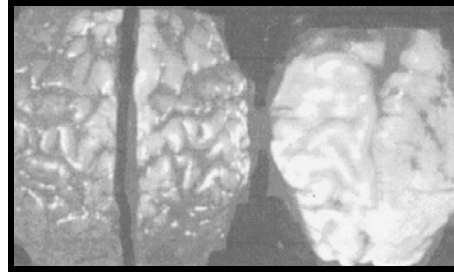
*Alcohol causes more damage to the developing foetus than any other Substance, including marijuana, heroin and cocaine.*

*(Institute of Medicine 1996)*

*All information sourced www.fasstar.com*

Brain of normal baby

Brain of baby with FAS



**Alcohol is a 'Teratogen' (a substance that is toxic to the baby's developing brain).**

Damage can occur in various regions of the brain. The areas that might be affected by alcohol exposure depend on which areas are developing at the time the alcohol is consumed. Since the brain and the nervous system are developing throughout the pregnancy, the baby's brain is always vulnerable to damage from alcohol exposure.

**Not all damage from alcohol exposure can be seen on brain scans.**

Damage can cause lesions too small to be detected, yet large enough to cause significant disabilities.

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**Think before you drink as damage lasts a lifetime.**

# FASawareUK



**I say, "No thanks!" to alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. I want my baby to be born as healthy as possible.**

**For help and advice please ring  
FASawareUK 01942 223780  
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# Foetal Alcohol Syndrome

Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) and other alcohol related birth defects refer to a group of physical and mental birth defects resulting from a woman drinking alcohol during pregnancy.

## Four Primary diagnostic criteria indicate full Foetal Alcohol Syndrome. (FAS)

- Growth deficiencies-stunted prenatal and or postnatal growth.
- Permanent brain damages resulting in neurological abnormalities, delay in development, intellectual impairment, learning/behaviour disorders.
- Abnormal facial features: short eye openings, short nose, flat mid-face, thin upper lip, small chin.

Maternal alcohol use during pregnancy: some but not all of the primary diagnostic criteria for FAS can lead to such diagnosis as:

- Foetal Alcohol Effects (FAE) & Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)
- Alcohol Related Neurodevelopment Disorder (ARND)
- Foetal Alcohol Related Conditions (FARC)
- Alcohol Related Birth Defects (ARBD)

## The full spectrum of disorders come under the term Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)

Alcohol is a Teratogen (a substance that is toxic to the baby's developing brain) that affects whatever is developing in her Foetus when a pregnant mother drinks. Whether or not her child has the specific physical characteristics of FAS simply depends on when and how much the mother drank alcohol. However the brain is developing throughout the gestation, and prenatal exposure to alcohol at any time during pregnancy can alter the development of the baby's brain.

Prenatal exposure to alcohol causes an, 'invisible disability' That manifests behaviourally. Many children have brain damage without the all of the physical dysmorphology of full FAS, which reminds others of their disability.

Most infants with FAS are irritable, don't eat well, don't sleep well, are extra sensitive to sensory stimulation and have a strong startle reflex. They may hyperextend their heads or limbs and can exhibit hypertonia (too much muscle tone) or hypotonia (too little muscle tone) or both. Some infants may have heart defects or suffer from abnormalities to the ears, eyes, liver or joints.

Most children with FAS have developmental delays and some have lower than normal IQ. The degree of physiological characteristics usually corresponds with the degree of developmental delays. Most children with FAS have IQ's that are legally considered in the 'normal range'.

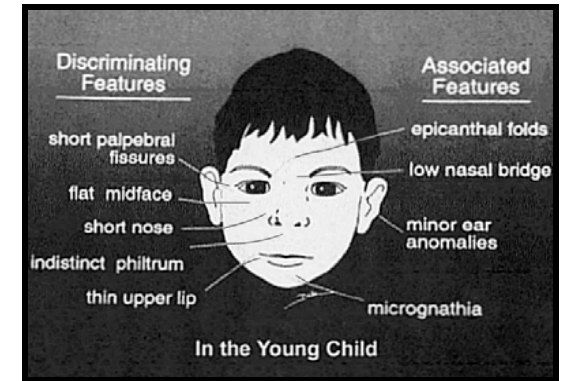
The most serious characteristics of FAS are the invisible symptoms of neurological damage that results from prenatal exposure to alcohol. These symptoms include:

- Attention deficits
- Memory deficits
- Hyperactivity
- Difficulty with abstract concepts (maths, time, money)
- Poor problem solving skills
- Difficulty learning from consequences
- Poor judgement
- Immature behaviour
- Poor impulse control

*Note: These symptoms are not 'behaviour problems' but are a result of permanent, unchanging damage to the brain (static encephalopathy) and are not within the child's control.*

**Adults with FAS have difficulty maintaining successful independence. They have trouble staying in school, keeping jobs or sustaining healthy relationships. Children and adults with FAS are also quite vulnerable to physical, sexual and emotional abuse.**

# What are the Characteristics of FAS?



\* Ann Streissguth Ph.D. & R.E. Little

Babies with FAS have many (but not always all) of the following characteristics:

- Small birth weight
- Small head circumference
- Epicanthal folds
- Small, widely spaced eyes
- Flat mid-face
- Short, upturned nose
- Smooth, wide philtrum
- Thin upper lip
- Underdeveloped jaw

*Note: Facial characteristics may not be as apparent immediately after birth or during adolescence or adulthood as they are between the ages of two and ten.*