



Adults with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASDs)

What are FASDs?

- Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASDs) are a group of conditions that can occur in a person whose mother drank alcohol during pregnancy. -These effects may include physical, mental, behavioral, and/or learning disabilities with possible lifelong implications.
- Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) is the most severe form of the disorder. Individuals with FAS might have abnormal facial features, growth problems, and central nervous system (CNS) problems. Not all individuals are affected to the same degree. -Some may show effects on thinking or behavior while others do not seem to be affected in any way.

What do we know about adults with FASDs?

- FASD is a spectrum disorder, meaning there is a range of effects of FASD on adults. -Those who are severely affected as children are likely to continue to be more severely affected as adults.
- Studies based on affected adults in clinical treatment samples suggest that FASD is related to problem behaviors. These include substance use, illegal behavior, and mental health problems. -Individuals in clinical treatment are usually among the most severely affected.
- Adults with FAS often need support as they try to navigate housing, employment, transportation, and money management.

How prevalent are FASDs?

- For FAS, the most severe form, prevalence is estimated at 0.2 to 1.5 per 1,000 live births in the U.S.
- For the full spectrum of FASD effects, including severe and milder effects, the prevalence is estimated to be as high as 1 to 5 per 100 school children (or 1% to 5% of the population).

Do adults still show physical features characteristic of FASDs?

- Physical characteristics can still be seen in adults. Some researchers suggest that the physical characteristics are less apparent as individuals mature and become adults.

How can I prevent FASDs?

- There is no known safe amount or safe time to drink during pregnancy. To prevent FASDs, a woman should not drink alcohol while she is pregnant, or might be pregnant. This includes abstaining from wine, beer, and hard liquor.



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What do we know about brain structure and function in adults with FASDs?

Brain imaging studies help us understand how the brain works. Some studies focus on size or structure of the brain. Others focus on how the brain responds in specific situations. These studies have provided lots of information on how adults with FASDs compare to those who have not been exposed to alcohol.

- Structural analyses show that brains of severely affected individuals are smaller overall than those of unaffected adults.
- Researchers have looked at how the brain works when adults with FASD complete tasks in specific areas. Some of the findings show that adults have trouble focusing when asked to pay attention in a task situation or to solve math problems.
- Some studies have used an imaging method called diffusion tensor imaging. This method lets the researchers look at the white matter in the brain. They are trying to find out how well the brain is processing information.
- Studies have shown that FAS is related to deficits in white matter integrity. This may be the basis for lower processing speed and deficits in abilities such as planning and organizing often reported in FASD.

Do personal or environmental factors affect how adults with FASD do?

Yes, some factors can affect outcomes. Researchers, who studied adult outcomes in a clinical sample, reported several protective factors. These factors can improve outcomes for individuals with FASDs.

Positive factors include:

- Being diagnosed early (before age 6)
- Involvement in special education and social services
- Living in a stable and nurturing home
- Absence of domestic violence

Diagnosis and Referrals:

The Center for Maternal Substance Abuse and Child Development

Provides differential diagnosis and evaluation for effects of that exposure.

To refer for an evaluation, call the number below.

Website: msacd.emory.edu

Phone: 404-712-9810

MotherToBaby Georgia

Provides free evidence-based information about medications and other exposures during pregnancy and while breastfeeding.

Website: www.mothersbabyga.org

Email: mothersbaby@emory.edu

Phone: 855.789.6222

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, www.niaaa.nih.gov

National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, www.nofas.org