

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) FACTS



What is FASD?

FASD (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders) is a lifelong, brain-based physical condition caused by alcohol exposure during pregnancy. It affects how the brain and body develop and function.

Is FASD preventable?

Yes—FASD is preventable if no alcohol is consumed during pregnancy. However, prevention is complex. Many factors—like unplanned pregnancy, substance use challenges, trauma, or lack of awareness—can lead to alcohol use. Preventing FASD requires compassion, education, and support for women and girls to reduce these risks.

Is it safe to drink alcohol during pregnancy?

No. Research shows there is no safe amount, time, or type of alcohol during pregnancy. Alcohol passes directly to the baby, who cannot process it, and even social drinking has been linked to brain differences in children.

Is FASD a real thing? I drank during my other pregnancy, and my child seems fine.

Yes, FASD is real. Alcohol affects each pregnancy differently based on many factors—like genetics, nutrition, stress, and overall health. Some children may show no obvious signs, but that doesn't mean alcohol had no effect. Because there's no way to predict the outcome, there is no known safe amount, time, or type of alcohol during pregnancy.

How can you tell if someone has an FASD or brain-based condition?

You can't tell just by looking—FASD is an invisible, brain-based condition. What you might notice are signs like learning difficulties, memory problems, impulsivity, acting younger than their age, sensory sensitivities, or needing extra time to process information. Signs vary from person to person.

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How do I support someone with FASD?

Every person with FASD has unique strengths and challenges. Support means focusing on what they do well, helping with what's hard, and creating an environment where they can thrive. Remember—success looks different for everyone.

Can the Neurobehavioral Model help people who don't have FASD?

Yes. The Neurobehavioral Model applies to anyone with a brain-based condition, regardless of the cause.

What happens when FASD or other brain-based conditions go unidentified?

When brain-based conditions go unrecognized, people may be expected to function like their peers—which can lead to frustration for everyone. This can show up as anxiety, depression, withdrawal, or challenging behaviors that are really a cry to be seen, heard, and understood.

Is there a cure?

There is no cure for FASD, but early identification and the right supports can make a big difference. With proper accommodations and approaches like the Neurobehavioral Model, we can create a better fit between the person and their environment—reducing challenges and helping them thrive.

How many children are affected by FASD?

FASD affects 1 in 20 school-age children in the U.S.—making it more common than autism, which affects 1 in 59.

Are children with FASD more likely to be placed in foster care?

Yes. Children with FASD are significantly overrepresented in the child welfare system. They are 17 to 19 times more likely to be in foster care or out-of-home placement.