

FACTS *for* FAMILIES

No. 93

December 2011

Drinking Alcohol in Pregnancy (Fetal Alcohol Effects)

According to the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology, pregnant women should not drink any form of alcohol. Pregnant women who think they have should be aware of the serious and negative effects of alcohol on the development of the baby (fetus). In the United States, prenatal exposure to alcohol is the most common cause of birth defects. Exposure to alcohol during pregnancy causes damage to the brain and affects the child's behavior, these effects can be prevented by 100 percent.

Thousands of children are born with the effects of prenatal exposure to alcohol. While many people drink, alcohol is poisonous to the child that grows inside the womb. The ingestion of even an alcoholic beverage per day during pregnancy the baby in development can be exposed to the risk of serious birth defects. A small amount of alcohol can cause permanent damage to the child. The use of alcohol during pregnancy can cause serious problems in children and adolescents:

- Infants may show slow growth and developmental delay, unusual facial features, irritability, brain and neurological disorders, mental retardation and problems with their attachment to their fathers.
- Kids and school-age children may have problems with learning, low tolerance for frustration, inadequate social boundaries and difficulty reading.
- Teenagers can have continuous learning problems, depression, anxiety and inappropriate sexual behavior.

Fetal Alcohol Problems (AFP) described the negative effects and problems caused by drinking alcohol while pregnant. Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (SFA) is a more specific group of symptoms caused by drinking alcohol while you are pregnant. A child is diagnosed with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (SFA) when there is a prenatal exposure to alcohol and has:

- Facial deformities.
- Slow and retarded development.
- Brain and neurological problems.

Children who are suspected of SFA must be carefully evaluated by a pediatrician, child and adolescent psychiatrist or other clinical experience. Fetal alcohol exposure is often overlooked as the cause of the problems in the child's behavior. The effects of alcohol on the developing brain during pregnancy are not reversible. However, early intervention can reduce the severity of the disability and improve the chances of success for the child.

Drinking Alcohol in Pregnancy, “Facts for Families,” No. 93 (12/11)

The early intervention for EAF or SFA includes occupational therapy, special education and speech therapy evaluations.

If you are pregnant and find that it is impossible to stop drinking, talk with your obstetrician to help stop. It is important to get treatment to stop drinking as soon as possible. There are programs available either inpatient, outpatient and residential. Local programs (for example, "12-step program" of Alcoholics Anonymous) can provide support to quit drinking.

For further information see *Facts for Families*:

- # 3 Teens: Alcohol and Other Drugs
- # 17 Children of Alcoholics
- # 23 Children who are Mentally Retarded
- # 31 When Teens are Sons
- # 41 How to Choose a Treatment for Substance Abuse
- # 45 The Children's Exposure to Lead

If you find *Facts for Families*® helpful and would like to make good mental health a reality, consider donating to the [Campaign for America's Kids](#). Your support will help us continue to produce and distribute Facts for Families, as well as other vital mental health information, free of charge.

You may also mail in your contribution. Please make checks payable to the AACAP and send to *Campaign for America's Kids*, P.O. Box 96106, Washington, DC 20090.

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) represents over 8,500 child and adolescent psychiatrists who are physicians with at least five years of additional training beyond medical school in general (adult) and child and adolescent psychiatry.

Facts for Families© information sheets are developed, owned and distributed by AACAP. Hard copies of *Facts* sheets may be reproduced for personal or educational use without written permission, but cannot be included in material presented for sale or profit. All *Facts* can be viewed and printed from the AACAP website (www.aacap.org). *Facts* sheets may not be reproduced, duplicated or posted on any other website without written consent from AACAP. Organizations are permitted to create links to AACAP's website and specific *Facts* sheets. For all questions please contact the AACAP Communications & Marketing Coordinator, ext. 154.

If you need immediate assistance, please dial 911.

Copyright © 2012 by the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.