

# Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder is Preventable

*Expert: No amount of alcohol consumption can be considered safe at any time during pregnancy*

**By Jennifer Faringer**

A mother's alcohol use is the leading known cause of preventable developmental and cognitive disabilities. Children exposed to alcohol in utero are at risk for growth deficiencies, facial abnormalities, central nervous impairment, behavioral disorders and impaired intellectual development.

Consuming alcohol during pregnancy also increases the risk of miscarriage, low birth weight and stillbirth.

In 2005, the United States Surgeon General issued an advisory on alcohol use in pregnancy, which stated that no amount of alcohol consumption can be considered safe at any time during pregnancy and that the cognitive deficits and behavioral problems resulting from prenatal exposure to alcohol are life-long.

If women avoid alcohol entirely while pregnant or trying to conceive, alcohol-related birth defects are 100 percent preventable. Alcohol consumption has the potential to cause damage to the baby in the earliest weeks of pregnancy, even before a woman knows she is pregnant.

The long-standing position of American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) is that no amount of alcohol consumption can be considered safe during pregnancy, which reaffirms earlier recommenda-

tion by the U.S. Surgeon General.

As the effects of prenatal alcohol exposure occur on a continuum, we refer to this continuum as fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD). The more a woman drinks during pregnancy, the greater the risk of effects and the greater the potential range and severity.

While heavy drinking is linked to the most serious risk, moderate consumption can also be harmful. Occasional drinking has also been linked to more subtle effects such as learning and behavior problems like attention and hyperactivity disorders, and problems with judgment and understanding cause and effect.

NCADD-RA hosts a FASD Parent, Networking and Support group meeting. Participants Eileen and Mike Snyder adopted their son Aleksandr from Russia when he was 10 months old. He was born with fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) and is now 17 years old. They say the journey between then and now has been a roller-coaster ride.

"Having a child with FAS is not for the faint of heart," said the Snyders. "Being told that he had not been exposed to alcohol prenatally, only to find out differently, was difficult for us."

Having the proper supports in place and being a strong advocate has helped make everyday life possible when dealing with a child with FAS,

the Snyders said.

"When others stare at you and your child with disbelief in his antics, you learn to ignore," the couple adds. "When family members and others give you advice on parenting you smile and pretend to heed their expertise. We adore our son and pray he has many opportunities in his future. We would never trade a day in our lives with Aleks, but so wish we all didn't have the tremendous hurdles to overcome."

## *How to Seek Help*

For more information on fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, the FASD Parent group or to schedule a community presentation on FASD, contact Jennifer Faringer, director of DePaul's National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence-Rochester Area at 585-719-3480 or visit our website at [www.ncadd-ra.org](http://www.ncadd-ra.org).



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