

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders and Pregnancy

By Joe Kotsch, Perinatal Consultant

Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) is a 100 percent preventable condition. Women drinking alcohol during pregnancy is the leading cause of preventable mental retardation and can occur anywhere and anytime pregnant women drink.

It is not a new disorder. It has received increased attention by the health care, education and social service communities.

FASD is an umbrella term that describes the range of effects that can occur in an individual whose mother drank alcohol during pregnancy. It is not a diagnosis, but may include physical, mental, behavioral and/or learning disabilities with possible lifelong complications.

There is no proven safe level of alcohol consumption by women during pregnancy. It should be noted that binge drinking is especially harmful and that any alcoholic beverage is harmful.

In 1996, the Institute of Medicine made this sobering comment in a report to Congress, "Of all the substances of abuse (including cocaine, heroin and marijuana), alcohol produces by far the most serious neurobehavioral effects in the fetus." Alcohol is a teratogen (causes

harmful effects to a fetus.) The sole cause of FASD is women drinking alcohol during pregnancy.

Some health care practitioners, family members and others interested in the welfare of pregnant women and infants in utero might say that consuming a small amount of alcohol is thought to be useful for "settling nerves" as a good practice during pregnancy. This is not acceptable. The message that should be sent to pregnant women is that of the National Organization on FAS (NOFAS), "If you're pregnant, don't drink. If you drink, don't get pregnant."

The bottom line, with respect the question as to whether alcohol should be consumed during pregnancy/ is that no amount of alcohol has been determined to be safe to consume during pregnancy. (U.S. Surgeon General, 2005)

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For more information on FASD and pregnancy go to: www.fasdcenter.samhsa.gov/.

What Is Normal Weight Gain During Pregnancy?

By Joe Kotsch, Perinatal Consultant

It is important to assess both the nutritional and physical activity status of pregnant women. Generally speaking, an intake of an additional 300 calories is adequate to support a growing baby in the womb. The woman's Body Mass Index (BMI) should be taken into account as well.

Pregnant women with BMIs above the normal range should be encouraged to consume fewer calories. Pregnant women with BMIs less than the normal range should be encouraged to eat more calories.

Pregnant women should not only be encouraged to eat the appropriate amount of calories according to their individual needs, but should be encouraged to eat a well balanced diet with the necessary nutrients that is required during pregnancy.

For more information on weight gain during pregnancy, visit www.marchofdimes.com/pnhec/159_153.asp.