



6.1.2 Alcohol



Image credit: Best Start: http://www.beststart.org/resources/alc_reduction/pdf/static_clings_bi_lr.pdf

Alcohol is a common teratogen. Alcohol use during pregnancy can adversely affect the unborn baby. There are many factors that influence this effect, including the amount of alcohol ingested over time and differences in the way the mother metabolizes alcohol. There is also evidence that variations in a person's genetic makeup can affect the baby's susceptibility to alcohol while in utero.¹

The effects of alcohol exposure during pregnancy are considered on a spectrum, and thus are called fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD). These effects can include physical, mental, behavioural, and learning disabilities, as well as cognitive, emotional, and behavioural issues.²

The medical diagnoses of FASD include Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), Partial FASD (pFAS), and Alcohol-Related Neurodevelopmental Disorder (ARND).³ The diagnosis is always related to restriction in growth, changes in facial features, problems with the central nervous system, brain damage, and prenatal exposure to alcohol.⁴

¹ Reynolds JN, Weingbert J, Clarren S, Beaulieu C, Rasmussen C, Kobor M, et al. Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders: gene-environment interactions, predictive biomarkers, and the relationship between structural alterations in the brain and functional outcomes. *Semin Pediatr Neurol*. 2011;18(10):49–55

² Chudley AE, Conry J, Cook JL, Loock C, Rosales T, LeBlanc N. Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder: Canadian guidelines for diagnosis. *CMAJ*. 2005;172(5 suppl)

³ Public Health Agency of Canada, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/dca-dea/prog-ini/fasd-etcaf/index-eng.php>

⁴ Carson G, Cox LV, Crane J, Croeau P, Graves L, Kluka S, et al. Alcohol Use and Pregnancy Consensus Clinical Guidelines. SOGC Clinical Practice Guideline. *JOGC*. 2010; 32(8). <http://sogc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/qui245CPG1008E.pdf>

MOTHERISK, at the Hospital for Sick Children, is an excellent resource for more information on alcohol and pregnancy, and the effects of other drugs and substances during pregnancy. MOTHERISK offers The Alcohol and Substance Use Helpline (1-877-327-4636), which provides information and counselling to pregnant and breastfeeding women, their families, and healthcare providers.

