

Alcohol and Pregnancy Don't Mix

Drinking alcohol in pregnancy can be damaging to the baby. Preventing this harm is possible and on International Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) Awareness Day, 9th September, you can help spread the word.

The Outer Hebrides Alcohol & Drug Partnership and NHS Western Isles will be raising awareness of FASD across the Outer Hebrides through the month of September in secondary schools, doctors' surgeries and will be in Tesco Stornoway on the 9th September with an awareness stall.

What is FASD?

FASD is an umbrella term for a group of conditions that are all related to prenatal exposure to alcohol (i.e. while a baby is still in the womb). Children affected with FASD may struggle to learn and have multiple problems in their lives. FASD is preventable by avoiding alcohol at any time during pregnancy or when trying to conceive, as damage can occur; even before a woman knows that she is pregnant. Often the condition goes undiagnosed, or is misdiagnosed, and this can lead to secondary disabilities. The effects of FASD can be mild or severe. It is thought that around 10,000 people have an FASD in Scotland today.

'Invisible' characteristics include:

- Attention deficits
- Memory deficits
- Hyperactivity
- Difficulty with abstract concepts (e.g maths, time, money)
- Poor problem-solving skills
- Poorly developed emotional and social skills

Physical effects include:

- Smaller head circumference
- Heart problems
- Limb damage
- Kidney damage
- Damage to the structure of the brain
- Eye problems
- Hearing problems
- Specific facial characteristics

How does alcohol affect the baby in the womb?

Alcohol is damaging to cells and cell growth. When a pregnant woman drinks, the alcohol in her blood passes freely through the placenta into the developing baby's blood. As the foetus does not have a fully developed liver it cannot breakdown the alcohol as an adult does. Instead, the alcohol circulates in the baby's blood system. This can destroy developing cells and damage the nervous system of the foetus at any point during the 9 months of pregnancy.

How can FASD be prevented?

If women do not drink alcohol during pregnancy, their baby will not have FASD. Women are therefore encouraged to avoid alcohol during pregnancy or trying to become pregnant. Everyone can play their part in supporting women to ensure:

In pregnancy - NO ALCOHOL. NO RISK.

Can FASD be cured?

No. FASD lasts a lifetime. There is no cure for FASD, but research has shown that early intervention and appropriate treatment can improve a child's development and help them towards a more independent life.

For further information on FASD or substance misuse services please contact the Outer Hebrides ADP support team.