

What you need to know about

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

Key facts

- Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can damage the developing baby's brain, body and organs and lead to a lifelong disability known as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).
- FASD is the leading preventable, non-genetic developmental disability in Australia.
- If you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, not drinking any alcohol will prevent FASD.
- People with FASD experience a range of physical, behavioural, and cognitive challenges throughout their lives.
- A person living with FASD has their own individual strengths and challenges. Having access to diagnosis, disability support, services, and early intervention results in better outcomes throughout their lives.

About Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)

FASD is a neurodevelopmental condition caused by a developing baby being exposed to alcohol during pregnancy. It is a lifelong disability.

People with FASD experience a range of physical, behavioural, and cognitive challenges such as:

- physical and emotional developmental delay
- impaired speech and language development
- learning problems, such as issues with memory and attention, and
- difficulty controlling behaviour.

Understanding FASD

Because it is a spectrum disorder, the experience of every individual with FASD is unique.

As with any disability, a person living with FASD has their own individual strengths and challenges. But all experience some degree of difficulty in everyday life and will likely need additional support with:

- motor skills
- learning
- attention
- social skills
- physical health
- memory
- communication
- emotional regulation.

The challenges experienced by people living with FASD may impact the quality of their lives, as well as the lives of their families.

People living with FASD can:

- Be impulsive or have challenges with understanding and learning from consequences.
- Have difficulty managing responses to sensory stimuli, which result in them becoming overwhelmed or distressed in busy environments.
- Have challenges with regulating their emotions, and need a caregiver or other adult to support them with this.
- Demonstrate delayed language development impacting their ability to communicate their thoughts or needs, and participate in conversations with family, peers, and other people.
- Find social interactions and activities difficult.

People with FASD may struggle with daily activities and environments – and this can create a barrier to them becoming independent. Someone with FASD will often require supervision and assistance for activities where other people of the same age do not.

Diagnosis of FASD

Diagnostic assessment for FASD can be conducted with people of all ages. The Australian Guidelines for Assessment and Diagnosis of FASD outline the criteria for diagnosis and can be accessed on the FASD Hub website: fasdhub.org.au/fasd-information/australian-guidelines-for-assessment-and-diagnosis-of-fasd/

A timely diagnosis of FASD can make a big difference, and ensure a person gets the care and support they need to reach their full potential. A diagnosis also assists families and support networks in understanding FASD and the challenges it may present.

If you are worried your child might have FASD, discuss this with your healthcare provider. If you are looking for a FASD-informed healthcare provider, search the FASD Hub Services Directory to find providers near you: fasdhub.org.au/services

Talking about your alcohol use

If you have any questions about alcohol and pregnancy, or you need support to stop drinking, talk to your doctor, midwife, or obstetrician.

Health professionals speak to lots of people about alcohol. They can answer questions and provide information on services offering support and advice.

More information and support

- To learn more about alcohol, pregnancy, breastfeeding and FASD, visit: everymomentmatters.org.au
- If you need help to stop drinking, speak to a doctor. You can also find support, counselling and referrals at the National Alcohol and Other Drug Hotline on **1800 250 015** or health.gov.au/our-work/drug-help
- To learn more about Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), access the Australian Guidelines for Assessment and Diagnosis of FASD, or find FASD-informed services, contact the FASD Hub at fasdhub.org.au or NOFASD at nofasd.org.au or **1800 860 613**
- For more information on the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) Alcohol Guidelines, visit: nhmrc.gov.au/alcohol

This resource was developed by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) and endorsed and funded by the Australian Government.

Learn more about FARE at fare.org.au