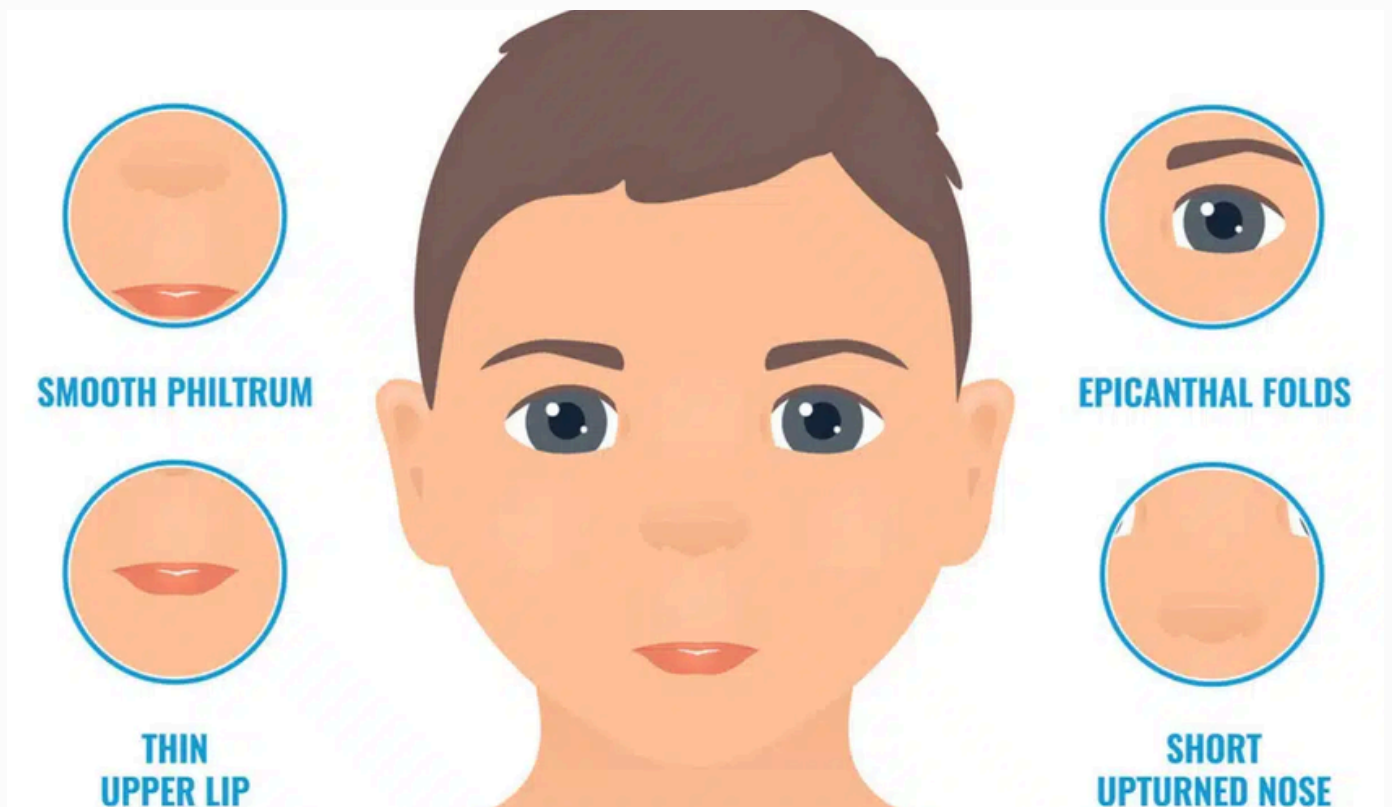


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FETAL ALCOHOL SYNDROME: A COMPREHENSIVE OVERVIEW



PAN-AFRICAN
MANAGED CARE

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) is a severe condition that occurs in a child as a result of alcohol exposure during pregnancy. It is part of the broader spectrum of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD), a range of conditions caused by alcohol consumption during pregnancy that impact a child's development in various ways. FAS represents the most severe manifestation of these disorders, encompassing a range of disabilities affecting behavior, learning, physical development, and social functioning.

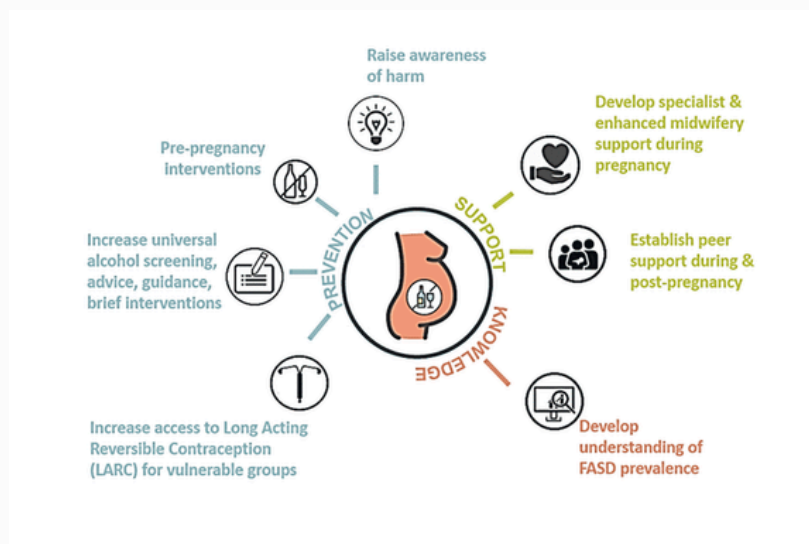


Fetal alcohol syndrome is caused by the consumption of alcohol during pregnancy. Alcohol passes through the placenta and into the fetus, where it interferes with normal development, particularly the formation of the brain and other organs. The timing of alcohol exposure plays a significant role in determining the extent of the damage, with the highest risk during the first trimester when the brain is developing most rapidly. However, any consumption of alcohol during pregnancy, at any time, can potentially lead to FASD. There is no known safe level of alcohol consumption during pregnancy. Even small amounts can have significant effects on the fetus, depending on factors such as the timing, duration, and frequency of alcohol use, as well as the mother's overall health. Women who are pregnant or planning to become pregnant should abstain from drinking alcohol to eliminate any risk to their developing child.

Children with fetal alcohol syndrome often exhibit distinctive facial features, including small eyes, a thin upper lip, a flat nose bridge, and a smooth philtrum (the area between the nose and upper lip).

Other physical manifestations may include:

- Slow physical growth both before and after birth.
- Delayed developmental milestones such as sitting, talking, and walking.
- Vision or hearing impairments.
- A smaller than average head and brain size, often associated with reduced cognitive abilities.
- Developmental changes affecting organs such as the heart, kidneys, and bones.



Children with fetal alcohol syndrome commonly experience significant learning and intellectual disabilities. Cognitive symptoms may include:

- Intellectual disability, including difficulty with memory, attention, and learning new concepts.
- Impaired judgment and decision-making, leading to difficulty in understanding the consequences of their actions.
- Short attention spans that make it challenging to complete tasks or focus on activities for extended periods.

Children with FAS often experience difficulties with social interactions and emotional regulation. Behavioral and social symptoms may include:

- Academic challenges, such as issues with attendance, behavior, and peer interactions.
- Difficulty in communication and developing social skills, leading to problems with relationships.
- Trouble adapting to changes in routine or shifting focus between tasks.
- Behavioral issues, including difficulty controlling emotions or actions.

Fetal alcohol syndrome represents one of the most severe consequences of alcohol consumption during pregnancy, with lifelong implications for the affected child. The condition can lead to significant physical, cognitive, and behavioral challenges, many of which can impact a child's ability to succeed academically, socially, and emotionally. While the risk of FASD can be mitigated by abstaining from alcohol during pregnancy, early diagnosis and intervention remain crucial for improving outcomes for affected children. By raising awareness of the risks associated with alcohol consumption during pregnancy, healthcare providers can support pregnant women in making informed choices to protect their children's health and development.

References

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2. Cleveland Clinic (2022) Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, Cleveland Clinic. Cleveland Clinic. Available at: <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/15677-fetal-alcohol-syndrome>.