

# FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER (FASD)



Native Women's  
Association of Canada

L'Association des  
femmes autochtones  
du Canada

## Signs and Symptoms of FASD

- Growth deficits in height or weight
- Poor memory and recall
- Hyperactive behaviour
- Impulsivity and poor judgement
- Inability to predict outcomes
- Inability to recognize social cues
- Problems with coordination
- Seizures
- Developmental delay
- Difficulty learning
- Distinct facial features

## Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)

- An umbrella term used to describe a developmental disability that has a range of effects occurring in an individual who was prenatally exposed to alcohol.
- The changes to the developing brain depend on when and how much alcohol was consumed during pregnancy.
- These effects can have a lasting impact on the physical, mental, and behavioural well-being of the affected individual and can significantly reduce their quality of life.

**MYTH:** FASD is overrepresented in Indigenous populations.

**•REALITY:** Due to the mixed research findings and lack of high-quality evidence, it is not appropriate to conclusively say that there is FASD over-representation in all Indigenous communities.

**MYTH:** You can tell just by looking at a person that they have FASD.

**•REALITY:** FASD is usually an invisible brain disorder. That being said, a minority of people with FASD have distinct facial features. It does not reflect the severity of the condition, but rather the period of time the individual was exposed to alcohol prenatally.

**MYTH:** A person with FASD can be diagnosed shortly after birth.

**•REALITY:** Most symptoms of FASD appear later in life when difficulties arise in school and social situations. Oftentimes, diagnosis is delayed or missed entirely, especially since diagnostic services are not always easy to access for Indigenous peoples.

**MYTH:** Every woman who drinks alcohol during pregnancy will have a baby with FASD.

**•REALITY:** Heavy or binge drinking are most commonly associated with FASD. As growth and development of the baby occurs at different points in time during the pregnancy, different parts of the brain can be affected depending on when and how much alcohol was consumed by the mother.

**MYTH:** Everyone with FASD will face the same challenges throughout their life.

**• REALITY:** FASD is considered a spectrum disorder. This means individuals with FASD may experience a wide range of physical, mental, behavioral and/or learning disabilities. People with FASD are also capable of living healthy, functional lives, especially with the right resources and support.

### References:

Canada FASD Research Network. FASD Fact Sheet. Available from: <https://canfasd.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/35/2018/03/FASD-Fact-Sheet-20180301.pdf>

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