

[fasd] Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders

DEFINITION:

FASD IS AN UMBRELLA TERM FOR A RANGE OF PHYSICAL AND MENTAL EFFECTS CAUSED BY ALCOHOL TAKEN BY A WOMAN DURING PREGNANCY AND BREASTFEEDING.



“There are no known safe levels of alcohol consumption in pregnancy” (1)

A recent study put the toll of alcohol consumption at \$36 Billion per annum in Australia.² This study took into consideration costs that had never been calculated before. **Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD)** is one of the costly byproducts of alcohol consumption. It is “an umbrella term used to describe a range of disabilities and a continuum of effects that may arise from prenatal alcohol exposure and it is widely recognized as the most common preventable cause of birth defects and brain damage in children.” (3) FASD is not a diagnosis in itself; it includes a range of diagnoses such as:

- **FAS** (Fetal Alcohol Syndrome)
- **pFAS** (partial Fetal Alcohol Syndrome)
- **ARND** (Alcohol Related Neurodevelopmental Disorders)
- **ARBD** (Alcohol Related Birth Defects)

Alcohol is a Teratogenic (4) substance. This means that alcohol crosses the placental barrier and interferes with the normal formation of the embryo causing malformations of the child in the womb.

The term Teratogenic is usually reserved for debilitating diseases such as Rubella and such horrors as the so called ‘wonder drug’ Thalidomide which was patented in 1957 by the German Pharmaceutical company Grunenthal as an antiemetic substance (i.e. it alleviated symptoms of morning sickness). At this time it was thought as unlikely that any drug could cross the placental barrier. Between 1950 & 1960 over 10,000 children in 46 countries were born with deformities due to this drug. These children were called Thalidomide babies. (5)



Thalidomide:

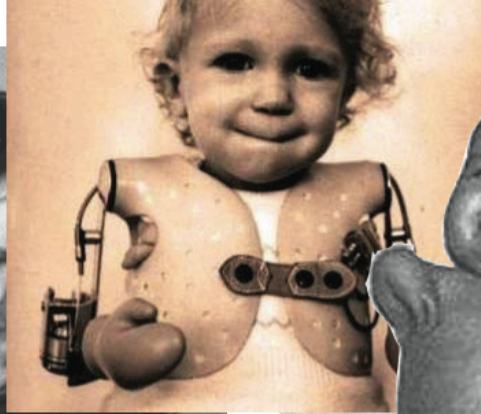
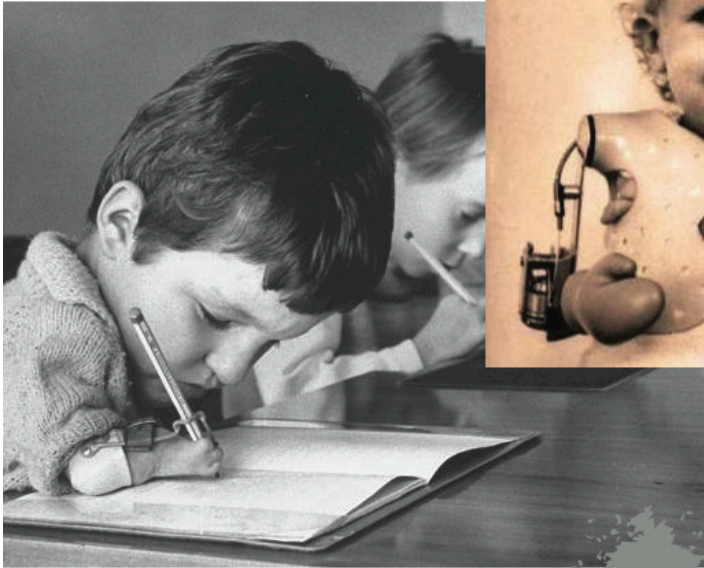
Thalidomide became known as one of the most infamous Teratogenic substances and “one of the biggest medical tragedies of modern times” (6). It caused ‘phocomelia’ or ‘flipper baby’ syndrome (7) Alcohol has earned the dubious honour of proudly standing shoulder to shoulder with such a substance. Unlike the effects of Thalidomide which were unknown at the time of release, today the effects of alcohol on a child in the womb are well known.

FASD is 100% preventable! (8)

Thalidomide info [continued]:

Imagine if we were told today that Thalidomide would be put back on the market as a morning sickness drug? The thought of this is unthinkable! The entire nation would be up in arms, women everywhere would rise up against such a policy...**yet, with hardly a whimper we allow a powerful Teratogen – Alcohol with no warnings on it to be easily accessible to any woman over 18 years of age.**

When a National Geographic photographer and contributor, George Steinmetz's work took him to Dublin Ireland, he was faced with the plight of Ellen O'Donovan's son Malcolm. He featured them in a National Geographic article (Vol 181, No.2). During his travels abroad Steinmetz saw the devastation caused by alcohol **"I met them in every country I visited – some with tiny, twisted bodies, others with faces tragically skewed."** (9)



UNUSUAL FACTS:

- Most medical personnel aren't aware of FASD. As of 2008, only approximately six medical schools of the more than 125 in the United States offer coursework on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. Unfortunately, many practitioners have not been educated on FASD or addiction medicine or trained to screen women for alcohol use disorders or diagnose children or adults with FASD. (10)

- FASD is the leading cause of mental retardation in western countries. (11)

- FASD has no cure but is 100% preventable! (12)

When you drink alcohol your unborn child drinks it too...



myths

- The science is incomplete and unclear – **FALSE!**

Since 1973 over 3000 medical articles have been presenting the true facts. (13)

- **Moderate drinking is safe – FALSE!** All drinking causes harm, heavier drinking causes more harm. The safest option is **NOT TO USE!** (13)

- **Beer and wine will not cause harm only spirits or-liquor will – FALSE!** All these drinks contain alcohol which substance that causes the harm.(13)

- **Drugs like Cannabis, Cocaine & Heroin are more harmful than alcohol – FALSE!**

Alcohol is the more harmful because it is Teratogenic whilst the others aren't. (13)





THE EFFECTS OF FASD : [short and long term]

For a diagnosis of FAS the following 4 criteria must be present: (14)

- Prenatal alcohol Exposure (confirmed or unconfirmed)
- Growth Retardation
- Facial Characteristics
- Neuro-developmental Problems

The immediate long term effects of FAS are notably physiological and neurological which in turn give rise to the so called secondary effects which emerge as a result of the physical and neurological effects. The most frequently diagnosed disorders of a mental health type due to FAS are: (15)

- Attention problems including ADHD
- Conduct Disorder
- Alcohol or Other Drug Dependence
- Depression
- Psychotic Episodes

The Physical characteristics of an FAS person are there for life.(16) Alcohol caused a cleft lip in this child The child's cleft lip has been surgically repaired (17)



FIRST AID : FASD is 100% Preventable but unfortunately is Not Curable.

The simplest way to prevent FASD is to abstain from alcohol. This is the safest option because in many cases of pregnancy the mother is unaware that she is pregnant for the first trimester. **Best practice is to avoid all alcohol if you are planning to get pregnant, or sexually active. Drinking alcohol during this stage may cause FASD.**

BEST AID:

never touch it



WHERE TO GET HELP : medical and other

- DirectLine Alcohol and Drug Counselling and Referral Line 1800 888 236
- NOFASARD (National Organisation for Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Related Disorder Inc.) 0418 854 947 sue@nofasard.org.au
- Live Free Victoria 03 58523777



REFERENCES:

1. www.nofasard.org
2. www.aerf.org.au
3. www.nofasard.org.au
4. www.nofas.org
5. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thalidomide
6. www.bbc.co.uk/science/horizon/2004/thalidomide.shtml
7. http://medicaldictionary.thefreedictionary.com/
8. www.fasdcenter.samhsa.gov
9. www.faslink.org/national%20geographic%20-%20article%20on%20fetal%20alcohol.htm
10. www.nofas.org
11. http://come-over.to/FAS/FASDfacts.htm
12. Ibid
13. www.nofas.org
14. www.nofas.org
15. pregnancy.emedtv.com
16. pubs.niaaa.nih.gov
17. pubs.niaaa.nih.gov
18. www.sandas.org.au



Dalgarno
INSTITUTE

(Coalition of Alcohol and Drug Educators) Phone: 1300 975 002
Email: admin@dalgarnoinstitute.org.au www.nobrainier.org.au