



Fetal Alcohol Syndrome



Overview

A pregnant woman who drinks alcohol can harm her developing baby. Fetal alcohol syndrome includes a range of problems seen in these babies. It can lead to lifelong issues.

Causes

When a pregnant woman drinks alcohol, it enters her bloodstream. It passes into the fetus. The alcohol interferes with the body and brain of the fetus. This hurts the child's development in serious ways.

Symptoms (Physical)

Fetal alcohol syndrome can cause a wide range of physical defects. This includes poor growth and a small head and brain. Children who have this syndrome may have deformed joints, limbs and fingers. The syndrome can cause problems with the heart and kidneys, and with the skeletal and nervous systems. It often causes distinctive facial features. These include narrow, small, wide-set eyes, a thin, smooth upper lip and a short, upturned nose.

Symptoms (Mental and Emotional)

Fetal alcohol syndrome can cause severe mental and emotional disabilities. It can cause poor memory and poor problem solving. It can cause poor judgment and rapid mood swings. A child who has this disorder may have trouble paying attention, may have difficulty in school, and may have problems interacting with others.

Treatment

There is no cure for fetal alcohol syndrome. However, doctors and therapists can help treat the symptoms. A child who has this condition may benefit from speech therapy, physical and occupational therapy, and medications. Counseling and other services may help a child succeed in school. And some physical problems, such as heart defects, can be treated with medical procedures.