

## **ZERO Alcohol if you are, or even might be, Pregnant. The Truth About Fetal Alcohol Syndrome**

During this season of celebration and parties, it is sobering to consider the devastating effect of alcohol on the unborn child.

Long considered a disorder linked with severe alcohol abuse, it is now recognized that the effects of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome can be seen across all cultural and economic groups.

Alcohol is a neurotoxin. It kills brain cells in all of us who consume it. Far more vulnerable however, is the tiny developing fetus. When brain cells are destroyed this early, it's like pruning at the beginning stages of growth. All the potential for later development has been cut short. The more alcohol is consumed – how much and how often – the more damage is done. Binge drinking is most harmful because the concentration of alcohol at one time is so high. Picture an almond-size fetus against multiple glasses of rum and coke.

The young woman, unaware that she is six weeks pregnant, who “parties hard” New Year’s Eve is at high risk. Put more accurately, her baby is at high risk. Alcohol is more damaging to the baby than heroin, cocaine or marijuana. The placenta is permeable to the extremely tiny alcohol molecules, while it creates a strong barrier against hard drugs. These narcotics do get into the blood stream and are harmful as well; but alcohol is particularly devastating because its’ effect is chiefly seen on the developing brain. ‘Fetal Alcohol Syndrome is a spectrum disorder, meaning its’ effects can range from mild to severe – and everything in between. It tends to go unrecognized and be under-diagnosed, as it shares symptoms with other conditions.

As young children, these youngsters may have difficulty with self-regulation, but not necessarily. School-age children may display average to high intellectual ability but have difficulty with concentration, abstract thinking (such as seeing cause and effect relationships) and physical co-ordination. I hasten to say that many children display these patterns and certainly are not experiencing FAS!

Symptoms of the disorder become more strongly evident in mid to late adolescence, when the ability to use judgment, be able to interpret social situations, to be realistic about options for the future and the like are severely impaired. Again, please note that the words “severely impaired” are key. The effect of FAS is seen in these most mature aspects of brain functioning and reasoning.

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome is considered to be a life-long disorder, due to damage and impaired development of the brain. In my practice with children and adults, I have seen remarkable improvement through the use of developmental movement therapy. These movements have to be practiced for about fifteen minutes twice a day.

Since movement actually builds new circuits and pathways in the brain, strategically employing the brain's plasticity, results in building better and stronger pathways over the old structure. You could say a new infra-structure is built which the person is now able to use in daily life. The pre-frontal cortex, where judgment and higher order reasoning occur, can be activated and integrated with other brain functions through movement! The wonderful thing about it is that it can occur at any age – thanks to neuro-plasticity!

My purpose in writing this article is to share knowledge regarding an all too prevalent condition; to alert young women to the risks of alcohol consumption and to provide hope and encouragement to people struggling with this condition – that an excellent, satisfying future is possible.

The womb is the baby's first home. Let it be as safe, nurturing and happy as possible.