



## What is FASD?

### Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD): Summary Factsheet

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (**FASD**) is a descriptor term used to identify the range of **physical, emotional and developmental** differences that may affect a person if they were exposed to alcohol during pregnancy. **Prenatal alcohol exposure** (PAE) is associated with numerous adverse outcomes. These include **miscarriage, premature birth and impairment to the brain and organs of the developing fetus**. The term **FASD** describes a continuum of neurodevelopmental difficulties and impacts across the **whole body** that can arise from PAE. **FASD** is frequently described as a **neurodevelopmental** condition. This term describes a collection of disorders that are a consequence of altered development of the **brain and nervous system**.



### A lifespan condition affecting brain & body

#### FASD causes physical impairments

**FASD** can affect all organs depending on **timing and dose** of alcohol exposure. Individuals with FASD report higher proportions of many conditions including; eye conditions (**45%**), asthma (**35%**), heart conditions (**34%**), skin conditions (**27%**), auto-immune conditions (**35%**), kidney conditions (**5%**), and digestion/bowel conditions (**40%**).

#### Neuropsychological impairments

FASD results in **significant impairments** in a range of **brain functions** including; cognition, memory, attention, academic attainment, impulse control and self-regulation.

#### Social impairments

Typically, individuals with FASD present with **dysmaturity**, are socially naïve, easily led, and may struggle with **language** and **developing relationships** with peers.

#### Motor and sensory impairments

Many of those affected evidence difficulty in **processing sensory information**, atypical **gross, and fine motor skills**.

# FASD is a ‘whole-brain’ condition

## Prenatal Alcohol Exposure (PAE) impairs brain development

Brain differences seen in FASD include differences in the **structure, size, growth, and function** of the **brain and central nervous system**.



### Corpus callosum

Affecting **processing speed, co-ordination and sensory abilities**.

### Frontal lobe

Affecting **co-ordination**, ability to **focus** and **shift attention, planning, and understanding consequences**.

### Hippocampus

Affecting the **storage and maintenance of memories**.

### Cerebellum

Affecting **posture control, gait, balance, and coordination of bilateral movements**.

### Basal Ganglia

Affecting **motor activity and cognitive functioning**.



## FASD as an ‘invisible’ condition

**Only 10% of those exposed to alcohol prenatally will have the facial features of FASD**

It is estimated that 10% of those with FASD will have facial features associated with PAE, forming a subgroup with a diagnosis of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS). The facial features may be missed and can attenuate with age, making later-life diagnoses more challenging. The remaining 90% will not demonstrate these sentinel facial features, making their condition ‘invisible’.

**No single cognitive profile of FASD**

The timing and dose of pre-natal alcohol exposure impacts on which domains are affected and the severity of the impairments. Therefore, every individual will have a different profile of strengths and difficulties.