

A Healthier Northland
He Hauora Mo Te Tai Tokerau



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Alcohol and other drugs

Alcohol and Pregnancy

NORTHLAND DISTRICT HEALTH BOARD

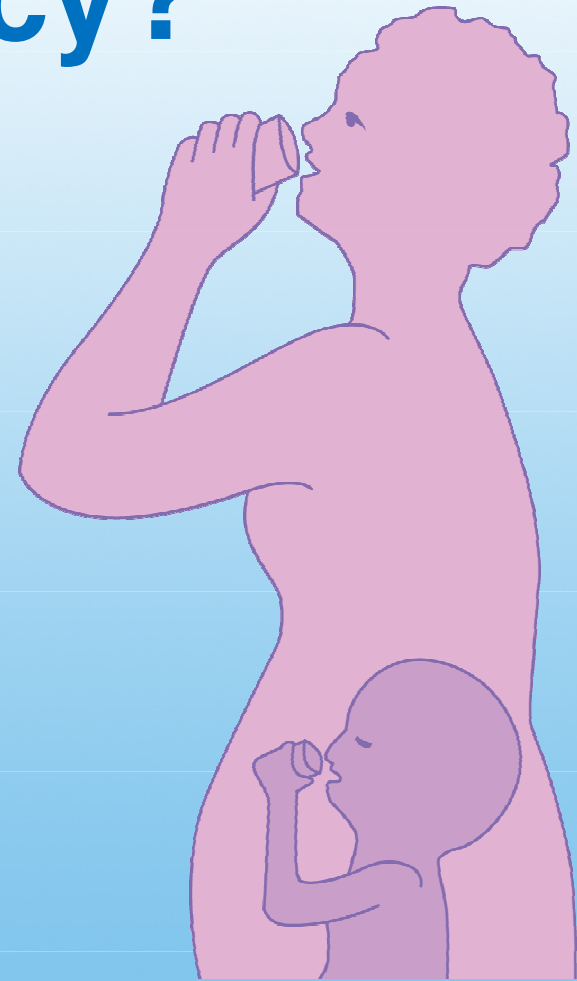
Te Poari Hauora Ā Rohe O Te Tai Tokerau



Why is drinking alcohol a problem in pregnancy?

Alcohol crosses the placenta

Fetus less able to process the alcohol



Alcohol is a 'Teratogen'

“...an agent or substance that adversely affects the normal development of a fetus (unborn baby)”



Common types and examples of teratogens include:

Environmental chemicals - Mercury, Benzene (major source is tobacco), Arsenic.

Diseases – Chickenpox, Rubella (German Measles), Syphilis, HIV, Herpes virus .

Drugs and medications - Alcohol, Thalidomide, Dilantin, Tetracycline.

Ionising radiation – computer tomography scan (CT-scan), x-rays, nuclear radiation.



Is there a safe time to drink alcohol during pregnancy?

NO

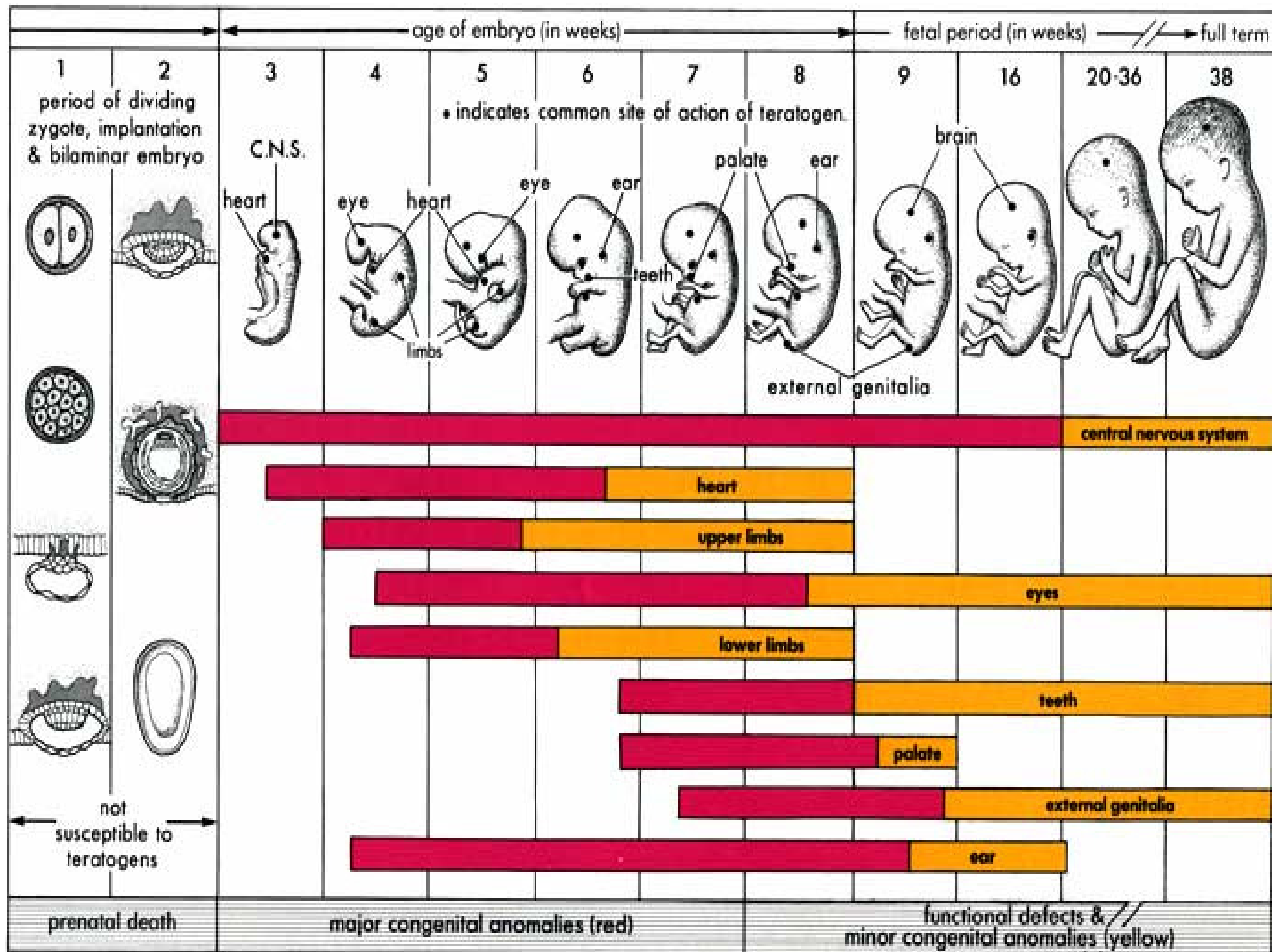
Especially not during the first 3 months

Problem:-

Many women do not know they are pregnant for some weeks.

The Egg....





**Is there a safe amount of alcohol
to drink during pregnancy?**

NO

Behavioural changes < 1 Std drink per week

Cognitive skills < 1-2 Std drinks per day

*** Binge drinking is especially harmful***



**Is there a safe type of alcohol to
drink during pregnancy?**

NO

**All types of alcohol can be harmful
during pregnancy.**



No safe time to drink alcohol

No safe amount of alcohol

No safe type of alcohol



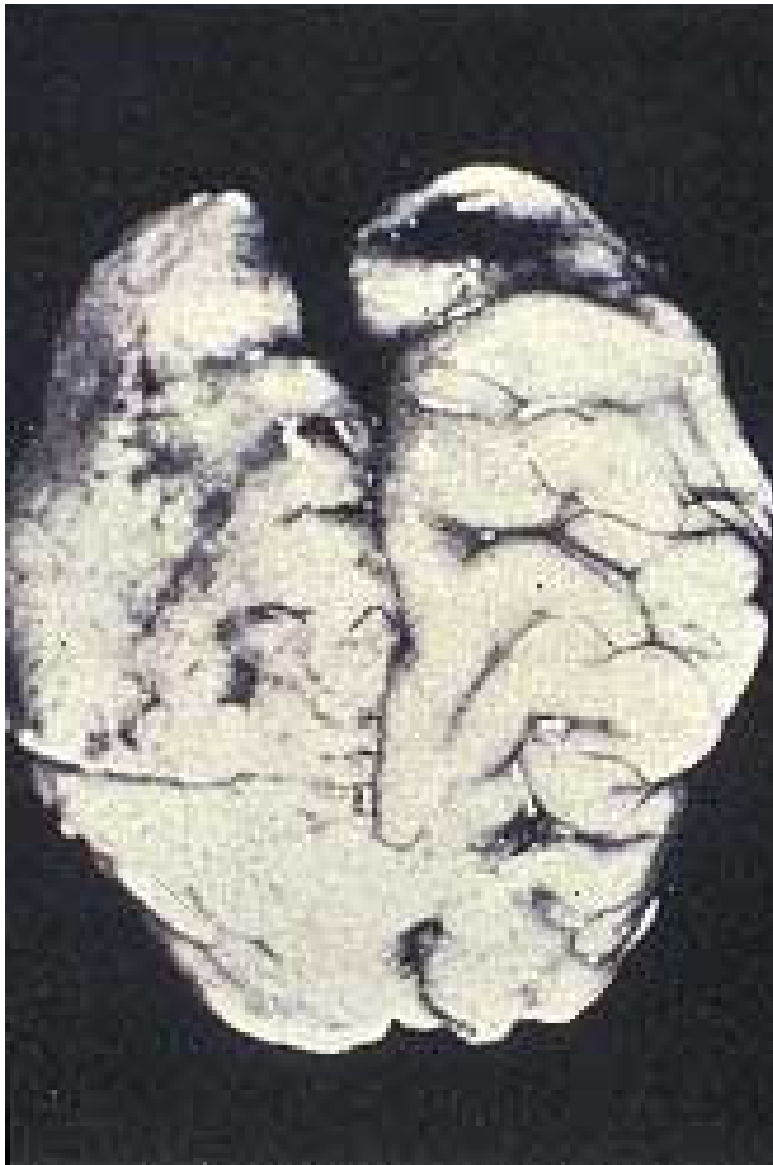
When you drink alcohol,
your unborn child drinks it, too

In the 1960s & 70s science found that children born to heavy drinking mothers could have a different physical appearance to other children and serious learning and behaviour problems.

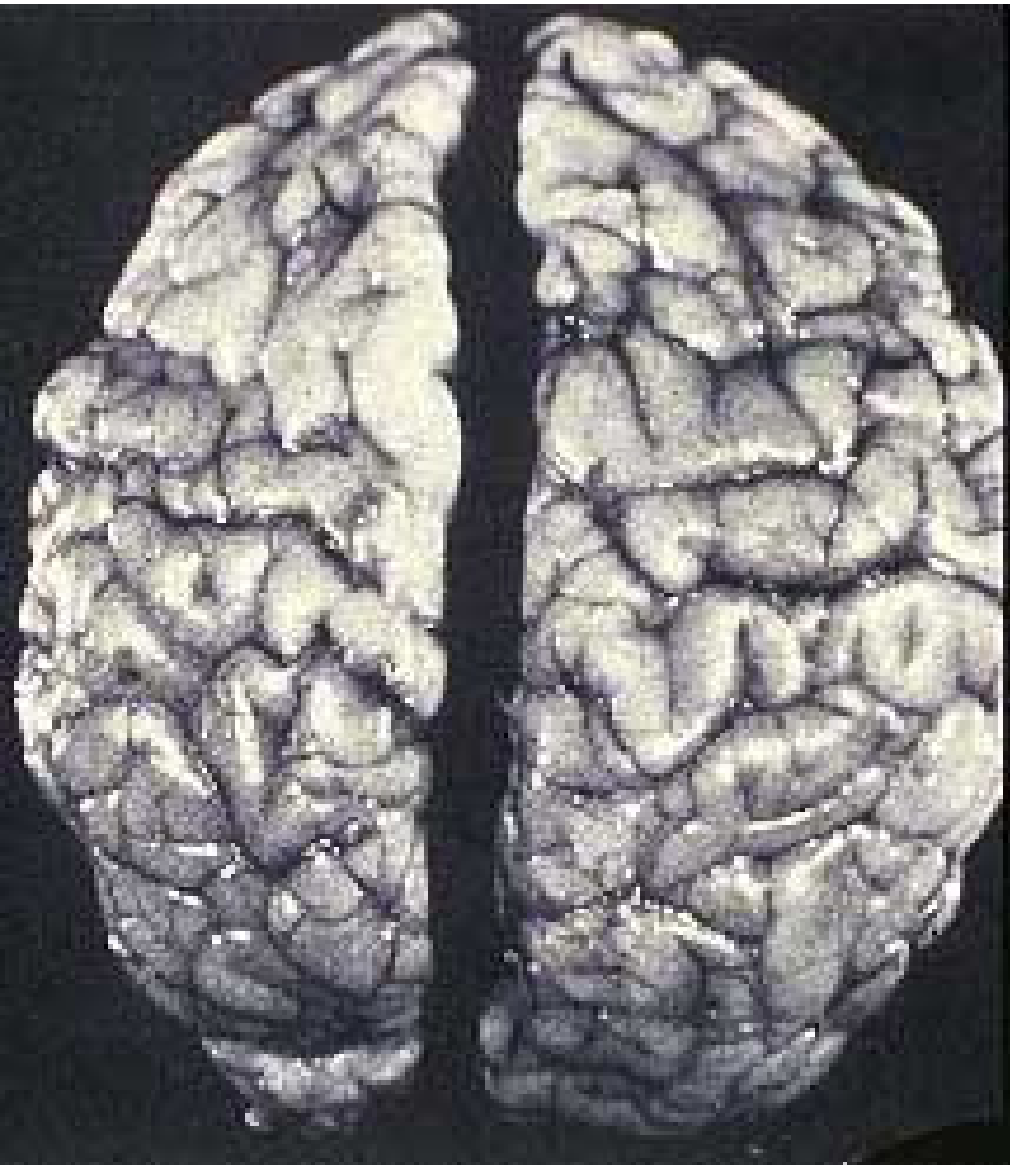
This was given the name Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS). It has been described in various ways for centuries – ignored until recently.

FAS is a leading cause of mental retardation in western societies and is found in all ethnicities and societies where alcohol is consumed.





6 weeks old with FAS



6 weeks old without FAS

Alcohol effects – like an Iceberg

FAS – Fetal Alcohol Syndrome
identified in 1973

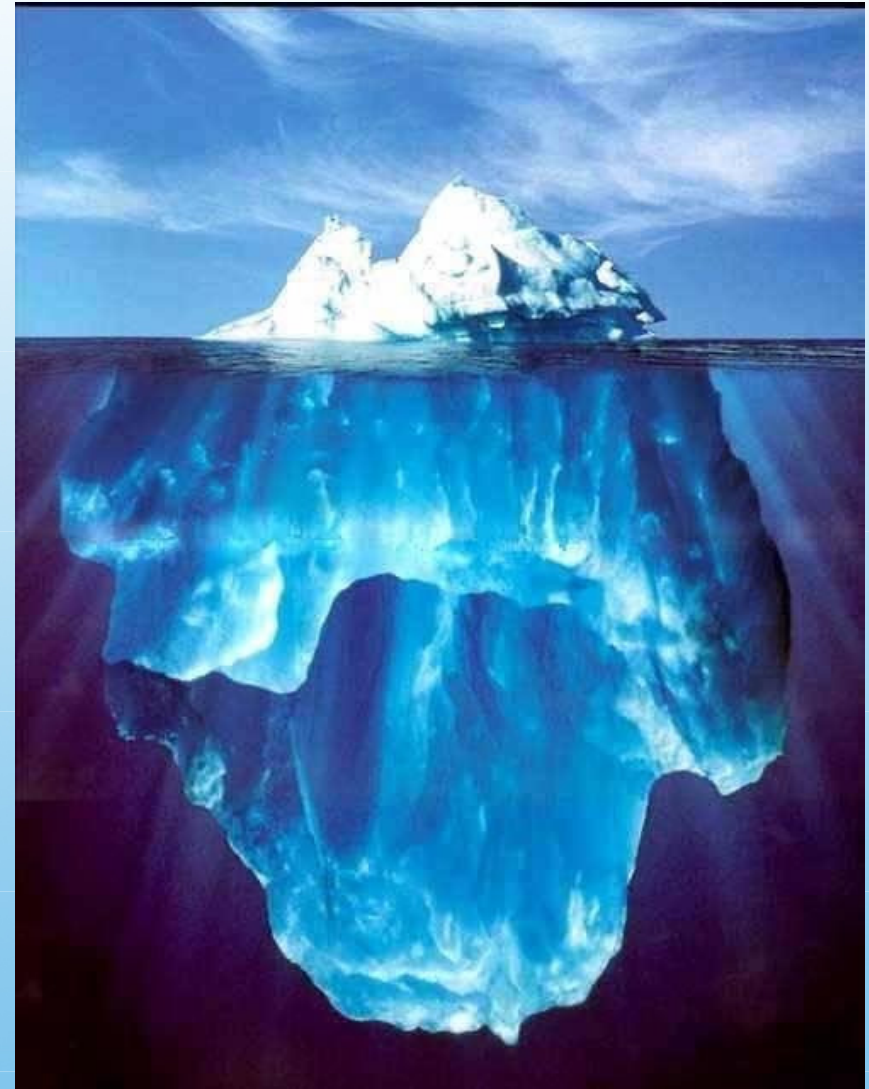
FAE – Fetal Alcohol Effect (Historical Term)

pFAS – Partial Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

ARBD – Alcohol-Related Birth Defect

ARND - Alcohol-Related Neurodevelopmental Disorder

FASD – (whole iceberg)
Umbrella term in international literature since 2004



Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders



**Fetal Alcohol
Syndrome (FAS)**

**Fetal Alcohol
Effects (FAE)**

**Alcohol Related
Birth Defects
(ARBD)**

**Alcohol Related
Neurodevelopmental
Disorder (ARND)**



FASD

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder



“FASD....range of permanent effects that can occur in a person whose **mother drank alcohol during pregnancy.**”

May include physical, mental, behavioural, and/or learning disabilities with lifelong implications.



100%
preventable

If a woman
does not drink alcohol
during pregnancy.



Number of People with an FASD

- There are no data on the prevalence of FASD in NZ.
- USA prevalence of FASD is at least 1 per 100.
 - Recent epidemiological studies of young school age children suggest the prevalence is much higher
 - Recent research suggests markedly higher levels of alcohol use during pregnancy in NZ compared to US
 - The binge drinking culture of NZ further exacerbates the risk as heavy episodic drinking can result in increased teratogenic effects due to the higher peak blood alcohol levels achieved.



- 5 years of independent studies have show that between 20-40% of pregnant women in NZ report drinking during pregnancy.
- Around 10% are drinking to intoxication after pregnancy recognition (Watson & McDonald, 1999).
- A national survey of midwives reported that 80% of teenage pregnancies are alcohol exposed (Mathew et al, 2001).
- 50% of women believe some alcohol during pregnancy is safe (Parackal 2006).
- In a survey of women who had just given birth, 60% reported binge drinking prior to pregnancy recognition (Jacquemard & Ho, 2009).



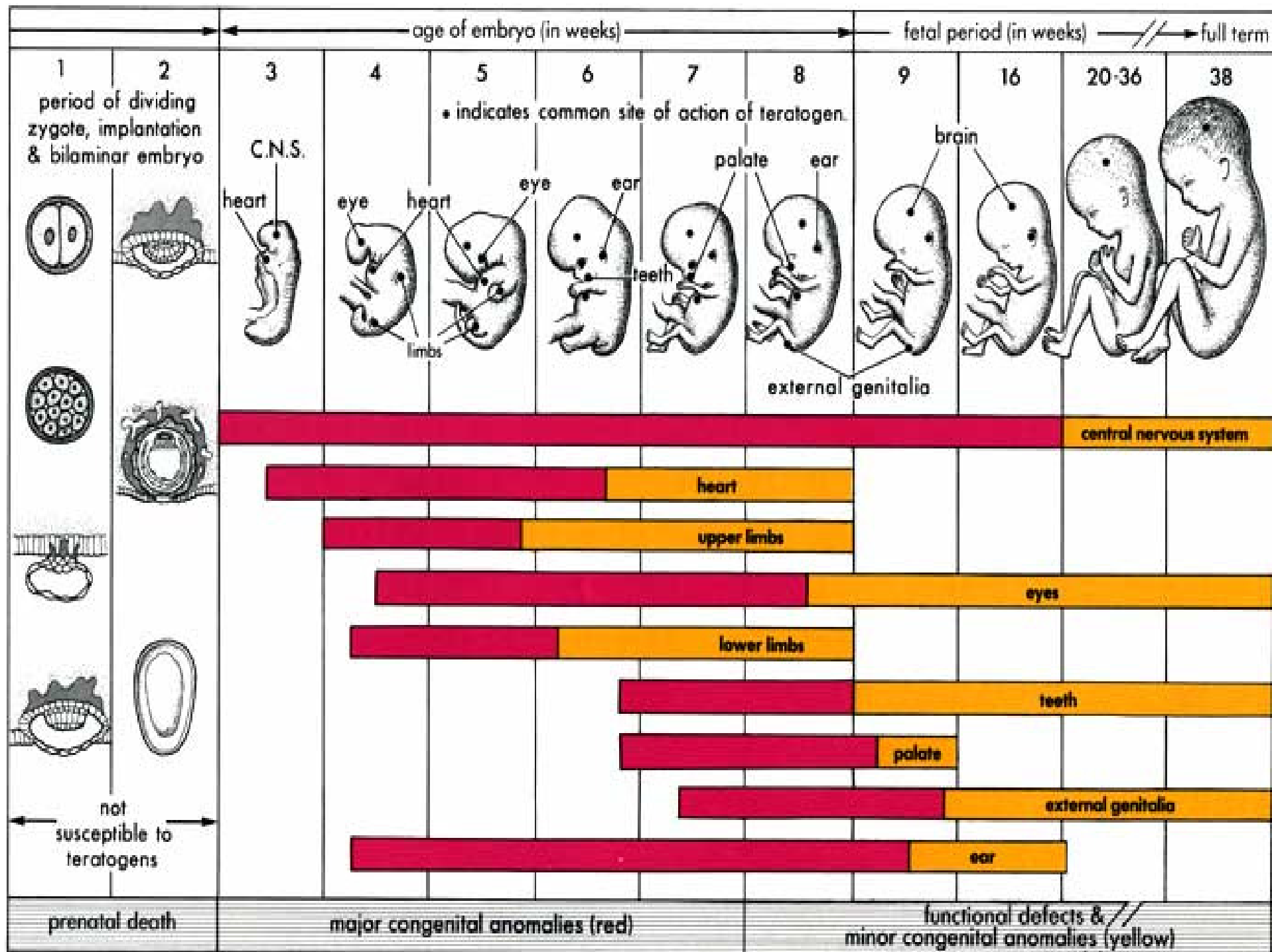
**Up to 3,000 babies born
every year in NZ with FASD**



Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

.....all affected in a different ways.





**Prenatal
Alcohol**



**Primary
Disability**



**Brain
Damage**



**Dysfunctional
Behaviors**



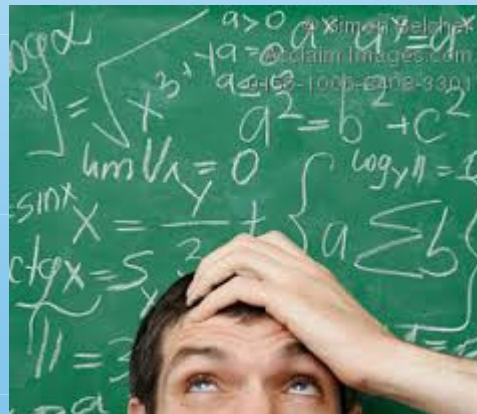
**Secondary
Disabilities**



**Trouble with the Law,
School Disruption, Etc.**

Primary Disabilities That Can Occur in Persons With an FASD

- Lower IQ
- Impaired ability in reading, spelling, and arithmetic
- Lower level of adaptive functioning



Typical Difficulties For Persons With FASD

Sensory:

May be overly sensitive to bright lights, certain clothing, tastes and textures in food, loud sounds, etc.



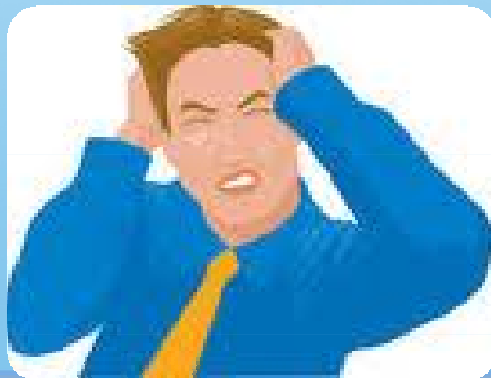
Physical:

Have problems with balance and motor coordination (may seem “clumsy”).



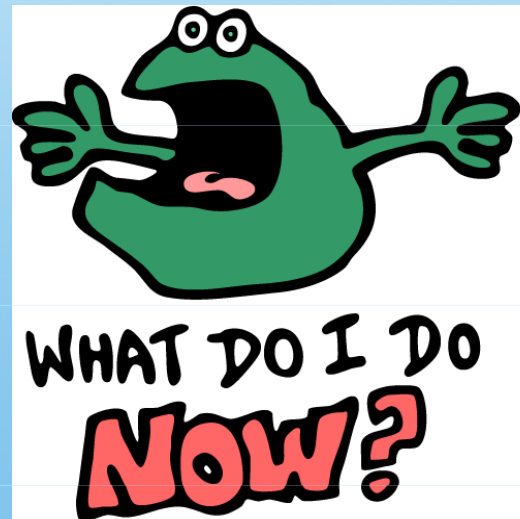
Information Processing:

- Do not complete tasks or chores and may appear to be oppositional
- Have trouble determining what to do in a given situation
- Don't ask questions because they want to fit in
- Have trouble with changes in tasks and routine



Executive Function and Decision-Making:

- Repeatedly break the rules.
- Give in to peer pressure.
- Tend not to learn from mistakes or natural consequences.
- Naïve, gullible (e.g., may walk off with a stranger)



**Prenatal
Alcohol**



**Primary
Disability**



**Brain
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**Dysfunctional
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**Secondary
Disabilities**



**Trouble with the Law,
School Disruption, Etc.**

FASD - effects on people's lives....

- 90%** had diagnosed mental health problems
- 80%** of adults were dependent for their daily needs
- 80%** had employment problems
- 60%** were expelled from or dropped out of school
- 60%** had been in trouble with the law
- 50%** had inappropriate sexual behaviour
- 50%** had been confined for mental health reasons, alcohol and drug treatment or as a consequence of law violations



What does all this mean in reality?

Emotional, functional and behaviour problems are significantly associated with FASD and these carry on from childhood into adolescence and adulthood - independent of intellectual impairment.



Thinking about Prevention

- Preventing FASD requires that all women of reproductive age and their partners, whanau, health professionals and community work individually and collectively to support that aim.
- These are children of a society that accepts high levels of drinking as normal and that makes them everybody's responsibility, not just the mums.



We need to sort out how we respond to FASD prevention and intervention.

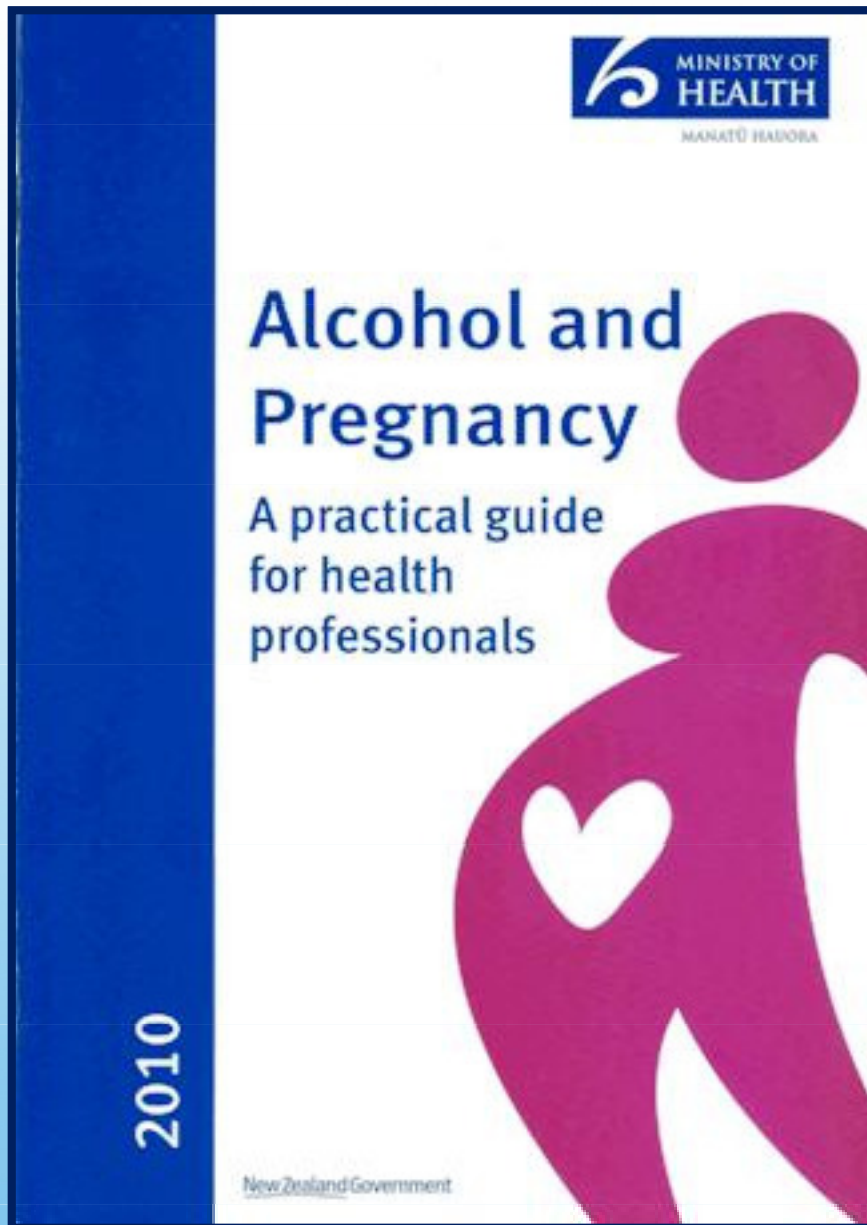
- **Because FASD is devastating for individuals and families**
- **Because FASD is preventable**
- **Because FASD is currently below the radar**
- **Because FASD costs too much if left in the ‘too hard basket’**
- **Because FASD requires planned integrated responses**
- **Because children are taonga (our treasures, our future)**



100%
preventable

If a woman
does not drink alcohol
during pregnancy.





3 steps....

1. ASK

2. ADVISE

3. ASSIST



Prevention Starts With Asking!

Ask all women of childbearing age about alcohol use:

- Ask routinely at every medical appointment.
- Ask at appointments in various systems.
- Ask in a nonjudgmental manner.
- Use effective screening tools.
- Ask about possible prenatal exposure.
- Imbed questions about alcohol use in general health questions (e.g., wearing seat belts, taking vitamins, smoking, etc.).



Advise all women of childbearing age about alcohol use:

- Provide brief advice about not drinking alcohol when planning a pregnancy or when pregnant and explain why this is important.



Assist women who are having difficulty stopping or whose drinking is problematic:

- refer them to a specialist addiction treatment service
- refer to the free **Alcohol Drug Helpline**

alcohol**drug**helpline
0800 787 797 
He kai a te rangatira he korero

The Egg ???



It's never too late

If a woman is drinking alcohol during pregnancy, it is never too late to stop.

The sooner a woman stops drinking, the better it will be for both her baby and herself.

