

Mother of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Child Shares Personal Story to Help Community

By Michelle Brubaker | September 17, 2013

September is international Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) awareness month. As many as 1 in 100 babies are affected by prenatal alcohol exposure today, which can result in a range of neurobehavioral disabilities and behavioral problems. One local mother has learned first-hand the potential repercussions associated with prenatal alcohol drinking after adopting a child with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS).

Julie Pollock's son, whose birth mother drank alcohol during pregnancy, was found mentally incompetent to stand trial after he was accused of killing his friend when he was just 10 years old.

"Raising a child is difficult, but raising a child with FAS takes its toll on your personal life, work, and in our case, a community," said Pollock.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1 in 13 women still drink alcohol during pregnancy even with the well-documented spectrum of negative physical and mental effects alcohol can have on the developing fetus.

"It's deeply concerning," said Kenneth Lyons Jones, MD, professor at UC San Diego School of Medicine and one of two researchers who discovered FAS 40 years ago.

In 1973, Jones and David Smith, MD, first identified FAS after examining several children with similar traits who had all been born to chronic alcoholic mothers.

Jones is considered the world's leading expert on FAS, as well as other areas of birth defects research. According to him, the concern has become amplified as recent, misleading reports have hit the mainstream media that suggest light drinking during pregnancy is acceptable for all women.

"Each woman metabolizes alcohol differently, and 40 years of research overwhelmingly supports the conclusion that a 'safe' amount of alcohol that any individual woman can drink during pregnancy has simply not been established," said Jones, medical director of the Center for the Promotion of Maternal Health and Infant Development and president of [MotherToBaby](#), a service of the international non-profit Organization of Teratology Information Specialists (OTIS).


Despite the statistics and personal stories told by affected families, Jones says he understands how many women can become frustrated with the list of risks presented to them during pregnancy.

“It’s so important that every woman takes the well-being of her pregnancy into her own hands by receiving a personalized risk assessment directly from an expert,” said Jones. “This way, she can make an informed decision about whether drinking alcohol or taking a specific medication, for example, is worth the risk during her particular pregnancy.”

Jones hopes this message will influence more people to spread the word about abstaining from alcohol during pregnancy.

“The most important message is that FASD is 100 percent preventable,” said Jones.

“I want people to know that the decision to avoid alcohol during pregnancy or getting help with an alcohol addiction during pregnancy could be the most important decision of your life,” said Pollock, who continues to bring awareness of the disorder by sharing her story with the community.

For questions about exposures, like alcohol, during pregnancy or breastfeeding, visit [MotherToBaby](#) , a one-stop-shop for evidence-based free counseling available to women, healthcare providers and the general public. All North Americans can be connected with MotherToBaby experts, like Jones, and receive individualized risk assessments regarding alcohol, medications and other exposures during pregnancy and breastfeeding through the toll-free counseling service at 866-626-6847.

Watch this [FASD PSA](#)  video to learn more.

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