# Four things you can do to support Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder International Awareness Day

Held on the 9th day of the 9th month to acknowledge the nine months of pregnancy, International Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Awareness Day is an opportunity to raise awareness of FASD and the need to avoid alcohol during pregnancy for the health of the mum and developing baby.

[FASD](https://www.nofasd.org.au/alcohol-and-pregnancy/what-is-fasd/) is a lifelong disability caused by exposure to alcohol before birth and it is the leading non-genetic developmental disability in Australia.

Here are four things you can do this International FASD Awareness Day to learn more about FASD and support people to go alcohol-free during pregnancy.

1. **Become familiar with the** [**alcohol and pregnancy guideline**](https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/health-advice/alcohol)

Haven’t heard of the Alcohol Guidelines? You’re not alone. [More than a third](https://fare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/ALCPOLL-2020.pdf) of Australians haven’t heard of the Guidelines, and almost a quarter of Australians aren’t aware that alcohol should be avoided during pregnancy.

Last December, the National Health and Medical Research Council released new Alcohol Guidelines. These Guidelines recommend that *‘*[*women who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy should not drink alcohol*](https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/health-advice/alcohol)*.’*

The [reason for this advice](http://C:/Users/cater/Downloads/Plain%20English%20Summary.pdf) is there is no safe level of alcohol consumption during pregnancy. When a person who is pregnant drinks alcohol, their developing baby’s blood alcohol gets to about the same level as that in the mother’s blood. The baby’s brain is also developing during pregnancy, and alcohol exposure can damage the developing brain and cause FASD.

By being aware of the alcohol and pregnancy guidelines, we can all ensure we aren’t contributing to misinformation about alcohol and pregnancy.

1. **Learn about Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder**

[FASD](https://www.nofasd.org.au/alcohol-and-pregnancy/what-is-fasd/) is a lifelong disability that results from prenatal exposure to alcohol, and it’s the leading non-genetic developmental disability in Australia.

FASD is often referred to as an ‘invisible disability’ because the impacts are not always visible. People with FASD often go for long periods without a diagnosis.

The [primary disabilities associated with FASD](https://fare.org.au/policy/fasd/) are directly linked to the underlying damage to the brain caused by prenatal alcohol exposure. This can result in poor memory, difficulties with speech and language, difficulty with judgement, reasoning or understanding consequences of actions, and behavioural problems, as well as social and emotional delays.

FASD is also associated with sight and hearing problems, sleeping difficulties, sensory stimulation, and global developmental delay. The challenges that people with FASD face varies between individuals.

Hear directly about the experiences of people with FASD and their families by listening to the [NOFASD podcast](https://www.nofasd.org.au/alcohol-and-pregnancy/podcasts/).

1. **Support people’s decision to avoid alcohol during pregnancy**

There are a range of reasons why someone might not drink alcohol. One of these reasons is because they are pregnant or trying to become pregnant.

When people are not drinking alcohol, there is a tendency for others to ask ‘why?’. We should avoid asking why people aren’t drinking alcohol — they may not want to disclose their reasons because they could be very personal.

By not asking ‘why?’, we can all help to not announce a person’s pregnancy on their behalf (whether they want it or not). We can also help to normalise not drinking alcohol, rather than reinforcing that drinking alcohol is expected.

Throughout pregnancy, a person’s decision to avoid alcohol is frequently challenged. There are the times at events when someone may say ‘it’s okay to have a drink or two isn’t it?’, or the moment when a well-intentioned family member says something like ‘I drank during my pregnancy and everything turned out just fine.’

Instead of offering these comments, we can support and respect a person’s decision to not drink alcohol throughout their pregnancy by not questioning it.

1. **Go alcohol-free in solidarity**

If your friend, partner, child or sibling is pregnant – another way that you can support them is to go alcohol-free during their pregnancy in solidarity.

The community around the person who is pregnant plays an important role in creating a supportive environment for them to go alcohol-free. By going alcohol-free together, we can create a space where there is no pressure to drink.

**Where to go for more information and support**

If you have any questions about FASD, you can call the NOFASD Helpline on 1800 860 631.

If you are worried about your drinking or the drinking of someone that you know, you can contact the Alcohol and Other Drug Hotline at 1800 250 015.

To find out more about other support available, visit the [FARE website.](https://www.fare.org.au)