

# Study suggests new way to screen infants for fetal alcohol syndrome

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Children who have been diagnosed with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) are more likely to have serious psychiatric and behavioral problems later in life, including a higher risk for dropping out of school, unemployment, and criminal behavior. Studies have shown that early intervention is a key element in minimizing the negative effects of FAS.

Unfortunately, the early diagnosis of FAS is not always possible, especially if certain physical characteristics are not present. However, a study scheduled for publication in *The Journal of Pediatrics* suggests a new way to diagnose infants affected by FAS.

Dr. Jennifer Peterson, currently at the Cleveland Clinic, and colleagues from Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital, Case Western Reserve University, and the Mary Ann Swetland Center for Environmental Health, studied a group of 216 infants whose mothers drank various amounts of alcohol during pregnancy. The levels of fatty acid ethyl esters (FAEE), which are produced when alcohol is broken down in the digestive system, were measured in the first bowel movement of the newborns. The babies were then given developmental tests at the ages of six months, one year, and two years.

Infants with higher levels of FAEE in their first bowel movement were found to be at risk for developmental disorders. According to Dr. Peterson, "Increasing levels of FAEE were significantly associated with poorer mental and psychomotor development during the first two years of life." She also notes that "early intervention for such at risk children

could minimize disabilities and improve developmental outcomes.”  
Measuring the levels of FAEE in an infant’s first bowel movement could be a useful method for identifying children at risk for FAS, which may make early intervention possible.

Source: Elsevier

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