Foetal Anti-Convulsant Syndrome (FACS)

It is important to remember that most women with epilepsy will have a healthy child. **If you are already pregnant and are worried about your AEDs do not stop taking your medication.** Stopping your medication will make it more likely that you will have a seizure and this is also a risk for your baby. Talk this over with your GP, consultant, obstetrician or epilepsy specialist nurse.

Foetal Anti-Convulsant Syndrome (FACS) is the name of a syndrome that can affect some babies if they were exposed to certain anti-epileptic drugs (AEDs) while in the womb. This can happen because during the first three months (first trimester) of pregnancy, the baby’s main organs develop. Some AEDs that cross the placenta during this time may risk the development of FACS.

**What is FACS?**

FACS can cause physical as well as developmental, behavioural and learning difficulties. Children with FACS can have a mixture of mild to more serious symptoms. Some physical symptoms can often be treated. Developmental delay can also result as well as speech and language problems, autistic spectrum disorders and poor motor control.

**Which AEDs carry the highest risk of FACS?**

It is thought that the AEDs most associated with FACS are the older drugs but some newer drugs may also cause problems. There are fewer reports investigating the impact of newer AEDs but research into this has started.

**If you are worried that your AEDs may put your baby at risk don’t panic, remember that most women with epilepsy have healthy babies. Do not stop your medication but speak to your GP, consultant, obstetrician or epilepsy specialist nurse.**
What should I do if I am planning to become pregnant?

Ideally if you have epilepsy and take any AEDs, plan your pregnancy. Pre-conceptual counselling is an important part of this. It gives your consultant a chance to review the medication you are on before pregnancy and labour. Together with your doctor or epilepsy specialist nurse you can decide on the best way to lower any risks to you and your baby. The risk of your unborn child being affected is small if you only take one drug but becomes higher if you are taking more than one drug or if you are on a high dose of a drug. It is best if you can take a low dose of one drug to stop your seizures. Your doctor may suggest that you switch to a different drug that is safer in pregnancy or that you slowly come off your medication before trying for a baby. Do not do this without your doctor’s advice.

Where can I go for more help and advice?

If you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy and have any concerns, contact your consultant, ESN or GP for help and advice. They will be able to talk to you about your individual situation. You can also read our Preconceptual Care Factsheet and get in touch with:

- The UK Epilepsy & Pregnancy Register: 0800 389 1248 who have trained staff available to answer your questions.

Further sources of information and support

- The Foetal Anti-Convulsant Syndrome Association (FACSA) supports children with FACS, their parents and families, providing help and advice on any issues relating to the condition. They have a parental guide and leaflets providing more information on educational issues.

For more information, check out their website www.facsa.org.uk or contact them on 01253 799 161 or 07866 377 278. They also run a number of facebook pages for
Parents and Children affected by FACS.

- The **Independent Foetal Anti-convulsant Trust (INFACT)** deals more with government issues. INFACT share FACS’ website [www.facsa.org.uk](http://www.facsa.org.uk) but have their own facebook page which is updated regularly with relevant news.

- The **Organisation for Anti-Convulsant Syndromes (OACS)** provides help and support to families affected by the syndrome. There is more information on their website [www.oacs-uk.co.uk](http://www.oacs-uk.co.uk). You can also contact them by emailing [enquiries@oacs.gmail.com](mailto:enquiries@oacs.gmail.com) or by telephoning 0208 3869271 or 07833 563778.