

Wellness Newsletter

Alcohol Awareness: When is Drinking a Problem?

APRIL 2018



While many people who drink alcohol limit the amount they consume, it is still by the far the most commonly abused addictive substance.

The need for alcohol awareness is greater than ever. One in eight Americans meet criteria for alcohol use disorder, according to a 2017 [study published in JAMA Psychiatry](#).

Alcohol Effects

Drinking too much – on a single occasion or over time – can harm your physical and mental health. Alcohol is a central nervous system depressant that is rapidly absorbed from the stomach and small intestine into the bloodstream. The liver only processes small amounts of alcohol at a time.

Individual reactions to alcohol are influenced by factors including how much you drink; your weight, age, gender, ethnicity, family history and physical condition; the food you eat and any drugs you may take.

Alcohol interferes with neuro-pathways in your brain. It affects mood and behavior, the ability to think clearly and physical coordination. Alcohol also suppresses your immune system, making you more vulnerable to sickness. Use over the long term can cause disease and depression. In addition, drinking too much is associated with accidents and injuries, violent incidents, risky sexual behavior, and workplace, social and family problems.

**April is
Alcohol
Awareness
Month**
 **NCADD**
ncadd.org

April is national Alcohol Awareness Month, sponsored by the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence. As part of the awareness campaign, people who drink are encouraged to abstain for three consecutive days. Those who experience difficulty or discomfort during this 72-hour period are urged to learn more about symptoms of alcohol dependence and seek professional advice.

How Much is Too Much?

In general, drinking is considered a problem if it causes trouble at work, in your relationships, social activities or how you think and feel.

To assess your own behavior, consider how much and how often you drink. Moderate drinking is defined as two drinks a day for men and one for women. Excessive use among adults includes binge and heavy drinking and any use by pregnant women.

Binge drinking is a pattern of five or more drinks a day for men and four or more drinks for women. Binging raises blood-alcohol concentrations to at least the legal limit of 0.08 g/dL and can result in alcohol poisoning, a potentially fatal toxic amount of alcohol. Heavy drinking is binge drinking on five or more days in the past month, or 15 or more drinks a week for men, eight drinks for women. Chronic drinking is severe alcohol use disorder, also called alcoholism or alcohol dependence.

Warning Signs

Signs of [alcohol abuse](#) include:

- Temporary blackouts or short-term memory loss
- Irritability and extreme mood swings
- Drinking to relax, de-stress or “feel normal”
- Drinking alone or in secrecy
- Feeling hungover even when not drinking
- Drinking a lot more than you intended
- Uncontrollable craving for alcohol

What Can You Do?

If you are concerned about your drinking pattern, ask your medical provider for intervention recommendations. At work, you can access confidential Employee Assistance Program support, as available.

Here are some tips for cutting back on drinking:

1. Stay within moderate drinking limits for your gender.
2. Pick one or more days a week when you won't drink.
3. To help relieve stress, consider these alternatives:
 - Get more exercise and spend time outdoors
 - Eat a well-balanced diet; don't skip meals
 - Try meditation or mindfulness training
 - Say “no” when you feel overextended
 - Get a full night's sleep, seven to nine hours
4. Change your routine:
 - Join a like-minded support group
 - Avoid places where drinking is the focal point
 - Supply non-alcoholic beverages at home
 - Keep busy, pursue a hobby, take a class

Stay Safe

Never drink alcohol immediately before or while working, operating a car, boat, plane or machinery, playing sports, swimming, or engaging in other types of activities that could endanger you and others.

Avoid drinking if you take medications that interact with alcohol, have a medical condition alcohol can aggravate or are pregnant – alcohol affects fetal growth. Do not mix alcohol with caffeinated beverages, including energy drinks. Stimulants can mask depressive effects of alcohol and affect your heart.

Finally, get help if you encounter someone who appears to be under the influence of alcohol and attempting to do something unsafe. They may act irrationally, have emotional outbursts or become violent. Call 911 if someone who has been drinking becomes disoriented, unresponsive or unconscious with shallow breathing. Alcohol poisoning requires emergency care.

To learn more:

[Alcoholics Anonymous](#)

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Fact Sheets – Alcohol Use and Your Health](#)

[National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence](#)

[National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism](#)

[Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs](#)

“Caffeine does not sober you up or reduce impairment due to alcohol consumption because it does not reduce blood-alcohol concentrations.”