



SPOTLIGHT ON: ALCOHOL ABUSE

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Why do people drink?

Students give many different reasons why they may drink. Some students say they drink because of peer pressure and to be part of a crowd. Some use alcohol to avoid difficult situations that may arise at school and work and with family and friends. Others use alcohol to avoid uncomfortable feelings, like anxiety or sadness. *Anyone who drinks runs the risk of developing an alcohol problem. A serious problem can develop quickly.*

How do I have a drinking problem?

Below is a set of questions designed for a person to find out if alcohol use may be a problem:

- Do you prefer to drink alone rather than with others?
- Does your drinking cause problems with school (e.g., falling grades) or at work (e.g. being late)?
- Do you drink to escape your problems?
- When you drink, do you get very emotional?
- Do you ever have memory loss or blackouts due to drinking?
- When you drink, do you often get drunk even when you did not mean to drink to excess?
- Do you find that you have to drink more and more to get the same effect?
- Do you get into trouble with the law or injure yourself when you drink?

If you can answer "yes" to one or more of these questions, you may have a drinking problem. Drinking problems are not a rarity; more than 10 million people suffer from alcoholism.

What effects can alcohol have on a person?

Immediate physical effects from alcohol include: loss of muscle control, impaired reflexes, vomiting, and unconsciousness. Because alcohol goes directly into the bloodstream, overuse of alcohol can affect almost every system in the body. Long-term use can cause cancer, brain damage, cirrhosis of the liver, weight gain, and birth defects if drinking while pregnant. Excessive drinking can also cause serious accidents, injuries, and death. For example, more than one out of every three motor vehicle fatalities involves alcohol and one out of every four drownings are alcohol-related.

Alcohol can have psychological effects as well. It can affect schoolwork and family and social relationships. Studies have shown that students who drink alcohol to excess end up with poorer school grades and take longer time to complete their academic programs. Because alcohol lowers inhibitions and impairs judgment, risky and violent behavior can result. For example, students impaired by alcohol often engage in vandalism and physical fights. Friendships and romantic relationships can also be jeopardized. Alcohol can lead people to say or do things they might regret, like making a bad decision about having sex with someone. Alcohol abuse can also lead to family conflicts and broken households.

One does not have to be using alcohol to be damaged by its effects. Children and partners of alcoholics can be seriously affected too. Family members and other loved ones often suffer from psychological symptoms, including low self-esteem, depression, health problems, and relationship problems, like difficulties getting close to others. They may also find themselves minimizing the severity of their loved one's problem, feeling responsible for the problem, or feeling a lot of anger, shame, and resentment.

In addition, family and friends of alcoholics may display their own addictive behaviors. Being related to an alcoholic or living with an alcoholic puts one at greater risk for alcoholism and other addictions, including gambling and overeating. Finally, family and friends who are close to an alcoholic often take on their responsibilities, attempting to function for them in ways that are often unhealthy. This is commonly known as "codependency" and includes feelings of having lost control over one's own emotions and behavior.

How can an alcoholic get help?

Help is available and easy to find! There are many different types of treatments to help those whose lives are affected by alcohol. For severe alcohol addictions, there are detoxification programs that require the alcoholic to stay in a hospital or a treatment center. There are also programs that treat the problem at a clinic that the patient can attend daily. Once the physical addiction is addressed, follow-up treatment is always recommended.

- Treatments for detoxified patients and those with less severe problems include individual, family, or couple's therapy. Support groups are also available for sufferers of alcoholism and their family members or loved ones.

If you think that you or one of your neighbors may suffer from alcoholism, contact your Residence Hall Coordinator and the campus Counselor to get