

Alcohol Abuse/Dependency

Currently, nearly 14 million Americans—1 in every 13 adults—abuse alcohol or are alcoholic. Several million more adults engage in risky drinking that could lead to alcohol problems. These patterns include binge drinking and heavy drinking on a regular basis. In addition, 53 percent of men and women in the United States report that one or more of their close relatives have a drinking problem.

WHAT IS ALCOHOLISM?

Alcoholism, also known as “alcohol dependence,” is a disease that includes four symptoms:

- **Craving:** A strong need, or compulsion, to drink.
- **Loss of control:** The inability to limit one’s drinking on any given occasion.
- **Physical dependence:** Withdrawal symptoms, such as nausea, sweating, shakiness, and anxiety, occur when alcohol use is stopped after a period of heavy drinking.
- **Tolerance:** The need to drink greater amounts of alcohol in order to “get high.”

People who are not alcoholic sometimes do not understand why an alcoholic can’t just “use a little willpower” to stop drinking. However, alcoholism has little to do with willpower. Alcoholics are in the grip of a powerful “craving,” or uncontrollable need, for alcohol that overrides their ability to stop drinking. This need can be as strong as the need for food or water.

WHAT IS ALCOHOL ABUSE?

Alcohol abuse differs from alcoholism in that it does not include an extremely strong craving for alcohol, loss of control over drinking, or physical dependence. Alcohol abuse is defined as a pattern of drinking that results in one or more of the following situations within a 12-month period:

- Failure to fulfill major work, school, or home responsibilities;
- Drinking in situations that are physically dangerous, such as while driving a car or operating machinery;
- Having recurring alcohol-related legal problems, such as being arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol or for physically hurting someone while drunk; and
- Continued drinking despite having ongoing relationship problems that are caused or worsened by the drinking.

Although alcohol abuse is basically different from alcoholism, many effects of alcohol abuse are also experienced by alcoholics.

The following symptoms are associated with abuse of alcohol:

- Temporary blackouts or memory loss
- Recurrent arguments or fights with family members or friends
- Continuing use of alcohol to relax, to cheer up, to sleep, to deal with problems, or to feel "normal."
- Headache, anxiety, insomnia, nausea, or other unpleasant symptoms when you stop drinking
- Flushed skin and broken capillaries on the face; a husky voice; trembling hands; chronic diarrhea; and drinking alone, in the mornings, or in secret. These symptoms are specifically associated with chronic alcoholism
- Odor on the breath
- Intoxication
- Difficulty focusing: glazed appearance of the eyes
- Uncharacteristically passive behavior; or combative and argumentative behavior
- Gradual (or sudden in adolescents) deterioration in personal appearance and hygiene
- Gradual development of dysfunction, especially in job performance or school work
- Absenteeism (particularly on Monday)
- Unexplained bruises and accidents
- Irritability
- Availability and consumption of alcohol becomes the focus of social or professional activities
- Changes in peer-group associations and friendships
- Impaired interpersonal relationships (troubled marriage, unexplainable termination of deep relationships, alienation from close family members)

-- If you or any of your family and friends are experiencing one or more of these symptoms please seek professional help immediately.

www.addictions.org/signs.htm

www.niaaa.nih.gov/faq/faq.htm



Alcohol and the Athlete

How does alcohol affect the athlete?

Alcoholic beverages are not only high in calories and low in nutrients but they impair the athletic performance for many reasons including:

1. Exercise and sweating doesn't help the body clear itself of alcohol. What is responsible for neutralizing alcohol from the body is the amount of the enzyme dehydrogenase, which is found in the liver. Those with little dehydrogenase will more difficulty breaking down alcohol than those with a greater amount of dehydrogenase.
2. When alcohol enters the body, it impairs the conversion of glucose to energy and the metabolism of fats and proteins. The liver ceases its regular functions of energy metabolism and begins to rid the body of the alcohol. Unfortunately, the liver is not very efficient in this breakdown process. In fact, the liver can only detoxify alcohol at a rate of about 10 grams per hour or approximately one drink.
3. Alcohol is not stored in the muscles as glycogen therefore alcohol calories can't be used immediately as energy.
4. Alcohol serves as a depressant to the central nervous system, thereby reducing motor skills (coordination, balances, etc.).
5. Alcohol is a diuretic, with small amounts leading to dehydration.
6. Too much alcohol increases the synthesis of cholesterol, which increases the risks of coronary heart disease (CHD).

How much alcohol is too much?

Each individual has a different tolerance level for alcohol. A low to moderate alcohol intake for one may be a high intake for another. It is difficult to define a "safe" and "moderate" intake of alcohol for adults but it is generally accepted by numerous health organizations (American College of Sports Medicine) that a person should limit their alcohol consumption to no more that 2-3 drinks per day. As a "rule of thumb", adults should drink no more that about one drink for every 23 kg (50 lbs.) of body weight.

Some athletes tend to consume beer immediately following their training and competition. This practice can lead to further dehydration and decreased glycogen (carbohydrate) stores. The best post-competition drink is one that is high in carbohydrates and nutrients (fruit juices and commercial sports drinks). These drinks will replenish depleted glycogen and water. Once the athlete is adequately hydrated with nutrient dense non-alcoholic beverages and/or water, then the adult athlete of legal drinking age can enjoy one or two of his or her favorite alcoholic beverages.

Drinking a lot of water doesn't help rid the body of alcohol but, it does help minimize the dehydrating effect of alcohol. *(From Eat to Compete)*