

Safe Drinking Tips

By using alcohol in a responsible way, you can reduce your risk of developing a drinking problem. The following are some guidelines for responsible drinking:

- Remember that drinking shouldn't be the primary focus of any activity.
- Recognize another person's right to drink or not to drink.
- Set a limit on how many drinks you'll have - and stick to it!
- Never combine alcohol with other drugs.
- Drink slow. If you don't have more than one drink per hour, the alcohol won't have a chance to build up in your bloodstream. This is a due to the natural metabolic functioning of the liver.
- Eat first! Especially foods that are high in meat or protein, like cheese and meat. It slows down absorption rate, so the alcohol won't hit your system all at once.
- Drinking soda with alcohol actually INCREASES the absorption of alcohol into your bloodstream, while water decreases it.
- Remember that alcohol is the #1 date drug! People who drink are way more likely to get sexually assaulted than those who don't.
- Never, ever, ever leave your drink alone somewhere, even just for a minute. If you or someone else feels extremely drunk after only a few drinks, get help because it's possible you may have been drugged.



If you're suspicious of your drinking habits and worried they may turn worse, there are plenty of places, both online and on campus that can help you. For more info on drinking problems, check out...

Donna Darmody + Health Education
CSD Room #211
Monday 8:30



Alcohol Use, Abuse, and Dependence

Some college kids who experience problems with drinking decide to stop after one embarrassing incident. They wake up the next morning, say, "Never again!" and they stop drinking, just like that. If you've done the same thing (told yourself you would never get that drunk again, or even drink again) but found yourself a few days later doing what you swore to yourself you'd never do, chances are your drinking falls into the category of alcohol abuse at the very least, and alcohol dependence at the very worst.

According to alcoholics-info.com, 15,000 college students develop addiction and dependence-related problems on alcohol each year.



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Types of Alcohol Problems

There is a huge range of alcohol problems: from mild and annoying, to severe and life-threatening.



Binge Drinking

Officially, binge drinking is defined as 4+ drinks for women, or 5+ drinks for men per night. It's also defined as drinking to get drunk, and is the most common drinking problem found in college students. Binge drinkers have the highest risk of injury (even over regular heavy drinkers!) because it's not the *amount* consumed that puts them in danger, but the *pattern* in which it is consumed.

Alcohol Abuse

Binge drinking turns into alcohol abuse when someone's drinking brings about an embarrassing or scary experience, but they continue to drink anyway. A person who abuses alcohol continues to drink in spite of personal, social, or legal difficulties. It can result in missing school, work, neglecting responsibilities, or trouble with the law.

Alcoholism

Alcohol abuse becomes alcoholism when drinkers crave alcohol, can't control their drinking, and experience withdrawal symptoms and an increased tolerance - you have to drink more to feel the same effect. Alcoholism is a chronic and progressive disease that includes a strong need to drink, despite repeated problems.

Alcohol Problems as Diseases

(Even though they don't act like them!)

One of the difficulties in recognizing drinking problems (specifically, alcoholism) as diseases is that they just don't seem like they are. They don't look, sound, smell, and obviously don't act like diseases. Unfortunately, drinking problems typically deny their own existence, as well as need for help.

According to the *National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence*, drinking problems are "mental obsessions that cause a physical compulsion to drink."



Alcohol: The Mental Obsession

At one point or another, we've all woken up with songs stuck in our head. No matter what you do, it keeps on playing. You try and you try to sing another song, but it won't stop. **There was something in your mind that you didn't put there, and despite how hard you tried, you couldn't get it out.**

That's an example of a simple *mental obsession* - a thought process over which you have no control. Such is the nature of drinking problems. When the drinking "song" starts playing in the mind of an alcoholic, the drinker is powerless. They didn't put the song there, but the only way to get it to stop is to take another drink.

Do I Have a Drinking Problem?

If you have to ask yourself, you probably do. If friends and/or family have told you that you have a problem, you probably do. And if you continue to drink *despite the negative consequences*, chances are you have a problem.

How Can I Know For Sure?

There are many signs and symptoms attributed to drinking problems. Drinking problems are progressive, meaning they show early signs of a problem, and then move on to more severe signs. If drinking continues, you might start to show signs of alcoholism or alcohol dependence. Signs include:

- Frequent intoxication
- Established pattern of heavy drinking
- Drinking in situations where you put yourself and others at risk (like driving)
- Blacking out
- Drastic change in demeanor while intoxicated
- Financial instability; having large amounts of cash at times and none at all at other times, due to buying alcohol

Another way you can tell if you have a problem is if you stop yourself from drinking, and then experience withdrawal symptoms:

- Jumpiness, nervousness, shakiness
- Rapid emotional changes
- Nightmares & Insomnia
- Trouble thinking clearly
- Nausea, Headaches, Vomiting
- An overall state of confusion and hallucinations