

Types of Alcohol Problems

Alcohol Abuse

Alcohol abuse means drinking so much that it creates problems for yourself or others. This does not mean you're addicted. It means you're drinking in a very bad way. Signs of harmful drinking include:

- losing time off work or school, or being unable to do your work properly because of drinking during the day or hangovers;
- spending money on alcohol rather than on food, rent and other necessities; leaving children alone while you go out drinking; getting into arguments and fights because of drinking; friends or family members making comments that you drink too much;
- accidents, injuries and getting yourself into dangerous circumstances because of drinking (e.g., falling asleep with a cigarette burning or the stove on, falling down, going out into bad weather without proper clothes, etc.);
- problems with police because of drinking (drunk driving, spending a night in a jail cell, creating a disturbance or assaulting others when drunk, etc.);
- health problems because of heavy drinking (for example, stomach problems, hangovers);
- getting drunk every time you drink;
- not remembering what you did or said when you had been drinking;
- being embarrassed about something you said or did when you were drinking; and
- having thoughts that maybe you shouldn't drink so much.

If you have had even one of these things happen once, it means you had way too much to drink that time.

If you are having even one of these things happening more often, you need to take a close look at your drinking. These kinds of drinking consequences lead to even more problems in work, family relationships, and physical health. They will also affect your self-esteem and your reputation in the community.

If you do not want to give up drinking completely, you can learn to drink in a way that does not cause these consequences. But it means you really have to pay attention to your drinking. You may need to learn to say no to family, partners, and friends sometimes and plan some other ways to have fun and socialize.

Psychological Dependence/ Drinking as a Habit

Often, we can get into the habit of drinking too much or too often. If someone started using drinking as a way to relax stress, it can be easy to start depending on that drink as the relaxation method. If someone has a lot of problems or feels depressed, s/he may depend on drinking as a way to forget problems and feel a little better for a while. If someone feels less shy when drinking, s/he may start using alcohol in situations that cause anxiety. If get-togethers with friends are usually at the bar, it's easy to get into the habit of thinking socializing means drinking. And it's easy to develop the habit of drinking way too much in these situations. (It's especially easy to drink too much when people around you are drinking a lot.)

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Eventually, when you are in these situations, you may feel like you need to drink or you do it automatically. You have developed a psychological dependence on drinking. Habits get built into our brains psychologically and biologically, like a path that you walk regularly.

Any habit can be hard to break. It may be easier to get some help, even if it's just sharing ideas and plans with a friend. It's a good idea to pay attention to the situations in which you drink. Who am I with? How do I feel before I drink? How do I feel when I've had a couple? How often do I drink too much and in what situations? And so on. Once you have an idea of your own patterns, it will be easier to change the habit.

Binge Drinking

Binge drinking is a kind of alcohol abuse habit where you do not drink all the time. You may not drink for days, weeks or even months. However, when you do drink, you drink so much you get drunk.

Binge drinking is not addiction. But it is the worst way of drinking. This is the kind of alcohol abuse that leads to some of the most serious problems:

- fighting and violence at home or in the community
- spending a night in a jail cell or other trouble with the police
- getting hurt or having an accident
- being so hung over the next day you cannot get to work, school or hunting.

You can change this way of drinking, although you will have to pay close attention to your own drinking and work actively to change the pattern. That is especially

necessary if people around you are drinking heavily. It is easy to get caught up doing what everybody else is doing. Follow the guidelines for safe drinking.

Alcohol Dependence

Alcohol dependence is a serious addiction. It means that a person's body and brain need alcohol for the person to feel OK. A person can be mildly dependent or severely dependent.

A doctor can diagnose whether a person is dependent and at what level. There are a number of signs that doctors look for. In addition to other symptoms, dependence generally includes:

• **Tolerance:**

People who are dependent have usually developed a higher tolerance for alcohol. This means that their bodies and brains are so used to the alcohol that they can now drink quite a bit more than other people before they start to show the effects.

• **Withdrawal Symptoms:**

A sign of severe dependence is having withdrawal symptoms when the person stops drinking. Withdrawal symptoms can include things like shaking, hallucinations, and seizures. People who are dependent may have to have a drink in order to stop these things from happening.

If you think you may be dependent on alcohol, make arrangements to see a doctor rather than quitting drink-

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ing on your own. Withdrawing from severe dependence can be dangerous.

A person's body/brain will get over the physical dependence in a few days. But a person who has been dependent is at risk of starting to drink too much again. Maybe they began drinking as a regular way to relax. Perhaps heavy drinking was the accepted way of socializing with friends. Maybe it was a way of dealing with depression and life problems. If the person has used alcohol in these situations, s/he'll be tempted to use again in similar situations and may become dependent again.

Anyone in this situation should learn to recognize what the drinking triggers are. They should then develop ways of handling those situations without using alcohol.

Nobody really knows yet why some people get dependent. But dependence can happen when you regularly drink a lot. If you drink, you should follow the guidelines to keep your drinking low and reduce risk. If you do not drink, do not start.

However, not everyone who has drinking problems, even serious drinking problems, is dependent or progresses to dependence.