

Is Alcohol a Problem for You?

by Jim Platt

As part of Alcohol Awareness Month, the Employee Assistance Program would like to take this opportunity to share some very important information with you about alcohol. Frequently, when we talk about alcohol problems, folks frequently leap to an image of the severely progressed alcoholic—someone impaired by their drinking to the extent that he or she is unable to work, rejected by their family, and/or suffering late-stage withdrawal symptoms. However, these are not the only scenarios, and according to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), 53 percent of men and women in the United States report that one or more of their close relatives has some sort of "drinking problem."

Differences Between Alcoholism and Alcohol Abuse

Alcoholism has little to do with willpower—one experiences an uncontrollable need for alcohol that overrides the ability to stop drinking. Although some people are able to recover from alcoholism without help, the majority of alcoholics need assistance. With treatment and support, many individuals are able to stop drinking and recover their lives.

The NIAAA identifies alcohol abuse, on the other hand, as differing from alcoholism in that it does not include an extremely strong craving for alcohol, loss of control over drinking, or physical dependence. Alcohol abuse involves a particular pattern of drinking over a 12-month period.

Should I Be Worried About My Drinking?

While we do not want to assign labels that categorize the extent of difficulty that one may experience with his/her drinking, we would like you to ask yourself some very important questions (*see next page*), designed to assist you in understanding your use of alcohol. They come from a composite of two alcohol screening instruments, the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT), which was developed by the World Health Organization, and the CAGE questionnaire, which was developed by researchers at the University of North Carolina. Both instruments are widely respected alcohol screening tools.

Other Helpful Resources

Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc.
Phone: (757) 563-1600 • Fax: (757) 563-1655
Email: WSO@al-anon.org
Internet address: www.al-anon.alateen.org

National Institute on
Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA)
Phone: (301) 443-3860 • Fax: (301) 480-1726
Email: niaaaweb-r@exchange.nih.gov
Internet address: www.niaaa.nih.gov

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)
World Services, Inc.
Phone: (212) 870-3400 • Fax: (212) 870-3003
Internet address: www.aa.org

National Council on Alcoholism
and Drug Dependence, Inc. (NCADD)
Phone: (212) 269-7797 • Fax: (212) 269-7510
Email: national@ncadd.org
HOPELINE: (800) NCA-CALL
(24-hour affiliate referral)
Internet address: www.ncadd.org

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Symptoms of Alcoholism

- Tolerance—This involves the need to drink greater amounts of alcohol in order to "get high " or achieve the desired effect.
- Persistent desire or unsuccessful attempts to reduce consumption—This is also known as "loss of control", or the inability to limit one's drinking on any given occasion.
- Withdrawal—This can include nausea, sweating, shakiness, and anxiety, and it occurs when alcohol use is stopped after a period of heavy drinking.
- Abandonment—The individual neglects important social, vocational, or recreational activities because of drinking.
- Continued use of alcohol—This occurs despite the knowledge of having a persistent or recurrent physical or psychological problem caused or exacerbated by drinking.

Symptoms of Alcohol Abuse

- The individual may fail to fulfill major work, school, or home responsibilities.
- There is drinking in situations that are physically dangerous, such as while driving a car or operating machinery.
- There are recurring alcohol-related legal problems, such as being arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol or for physically hurting someone while drunk.
- The person continues drinking despite having ongoing relationship problems that are caused or worsened by the drinking.

The following questions pertain to your use of alcoholic beverages during the past year. A "drink" refers to a can or bottle of beer, a glass of wine, a wine cooler, or one cocktail or shot of hard liquor.

- How often do you have a drink containing alcohol?
- How many drinks containing alcohol do you have on a typical day when you are drinking?
- How often do you have 6 or more drinks on 1 occasion?
- How often during the past year have you found that you were not able to stop drinking once you had started?
- How often during the past year have you failed to do what was normally expected from you because of drinking?
- How often during the past year have you needed a first drink in the morning to get yourself going after a heavy drinking session?
- How often during the past year have you had a feeling of guilt or remorse after drinking?
- How often during the past year have you been unable to remember what happened the night before because you were drinking?
- Have you or someone else been injured (physically or emotionally) as a result of your drinking?
- Has a relative or friend, or a doctor or other health care worker, been concerned about your drinking or suggested you cut down?

Please feel free to discuss your responses with a counselor from the EAP. We will be glad to assess your answers and speak with you regarding your relationship with alcohol.

You can also check out the Dartmouth Center on Addiction, Recovery, and Education (DCARE). This campus resource is a wealth of valuable information concerning all aspects of impairment by alcohol, including educational and treatment resources. The Web site for DCARE is www.dartmouth.edu/~dcare/.