

Straight Facts About Alcohol

Alcohol abuse is a pattern of problem drinking that results in health consequences, social problems or both. However, alcohol dependence, or alcoholism, refers to a disease that is characterized by abnormal alcohol-seeking behavior that leads to impaired control over drinking.

Short-term effects of alcohol

- distorted vision, hearing and coordination
- altered perceptions and emotions
- impaired judgment
- bad breath
- hangovers

Long-term effects of heavy alcohol abuse

- loss of appetite
- vitamin deficiencies
- stomach ailments
- skin problems
- sexual impotence
- liver damage
- heart and central nervous system damage
- memory loss

How do I know if I, or someone close, has a drinking problem?

Here are some quick clues:

- inability to control drinking: it seems that regardless of what you decide beforehand, you frequently wind up drunk
- using alcohol to escape problems
- a change in personality: turning from Dr. Jekyll to Mr. Hyde
- a high tolerance level: drinking just about everybody under the table
- blackouts: sometimes not remembering what happened while drinking
- problems at work or in school as a result of drinking
- concern shown by family and friends about drinking

If you have a drinking problem, or if you suspect you have a drinking problem, there are many others out there like you, and there is help available.

How can I get help?

You can get help for yourself or for a friend or loved one from numerous national, state and local organizations, treatment centers, referral centers, hotlines throughout the country and your employee assistance program. There are various kinds of treatment services and centers. For example, some may involve outpatient counseling, while others may be three- to five-week-long inpatient programs.

While you or your friend or loved one may be hesitant to seek help, know that treatment programs offer organized and structured services with individual, group and family therapy for people with alcohol and drug abuse problems. Research shows that when appropriate treatment is given, and when clients follow their prescribed program, treatment can work. By reducing alcohol and/or drug abuse, treatment reduces costs to society in terms of medical care, law enforcement and crime. More importantly, treatment can help keep you and your loved ones together.

Remember, some people may go through treatment a number of times before they are in full recovery. Do not give up hope.

Each community has its own resources. Some common referral sources that are often listed in the phone book are:

- community drug hotlines
- local emergency health clinics, or community treatment services
- city/local health departments
- Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous or Al-Anon/Alateen
- hospitals

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services – NCADI,
<http://ncadi.samhsa.gov/govpubs/rpo884/#gethelp>