



## Alcohol Use Disorder

Excessive use of alcohol that puts one's health and safety at risk or causes problems in daily life is known as alcohol use disorder. Alcohol use disorder ranges from mild to severe: the physical dependency traditionally known as alcoholism. It also includes binge drinking (5 or more drinks for a man, and 4 or more for a woman, within two hours). The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism defines a standard drink as one of the following:

- 12 ounces of regular beer (5% alcohol)
- 8 to 9 ounces of malt liquor (7% alcohol)
- 5 ounces of unfortified wine (12% alcohol)
- 1.5 ounces (44 milliliters) of 80-proof hard liquor (40% alcohol)

## Alcohol and Your Health

Alcohol depresses the nervous system and alters parts of the brain associated with pleasure, judgment, and self-control. Alcohol intoxication causes unstable moods, poor judgment, slurred speech, and inappropriate behavior. Coordination, memory, and attention may all be impaired and the person is at risk for falls, drowning, and other accidents. Some people have "blackouts," in which they are awake and conscious but their short-term memory is not working. When they sober up, they have no recollection of what happened while they were under the influence. Very high blood alcohol levels can result in alcohol poisoning, coma, and death.

## Long-term Health Problems

The cumulative effects of long term excessive drinking may include one or more of the following:

- Liver disease
- Digestive problems, inflammation of the stomach lining, stomach and esophageal ulcers, and inflammation of the pancreas (pancreatitis)
- Malnutrition and inhibited vitamin B absorption
- Heart disease, high blood pressure, enlarged heart, heart failure, and stroke
- Diabetes complications
- Erectile dysfunction in men and menstrual irregularities in women
- Involuntary rapid eye movements and/or paralysis of the eye muscles
- Birth defects, fetal alcohol syndrome, and miscarriage in pregnant women
- Bone loss and bone marrow damage
- Neurological complications such as numbness and pain in the extremities, disordered thinking, dementia, and short-term memory loss
- Weakened immune system
- Increased risk of mouth, throat, liver, colon, and breast cancer



## Driving Under the Influence

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People with alcohol use disorder are more prone to car, and motorcycle accidents. In 2013, there were 10,076 fatal car crashes — 31% of that year's traffic fatalities — involving a driver with a blood alcohol (BAC) of 0.8 or higher. This amounts to one death every 52 minutes. Teens and young people are especially at risk. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), teen alcohol use kills 4,700 people a year.

Many people believe they can still drive after a couple of drinks because they are just “buzzed.” Technically, “Buzzed Driving is Drunk Driving.” If you get pulled over, the Breathalyzer test does not draw a distinction. Assuming no one gets hurt as a result of DUI, the minimum terms for a misdemeanor first conviction in California are as follows:

- Loss of driver's license for a minimum of 30 days, followed by a five-month restriction allowing you to only drive to, from, or for work, and to and from an alcohol treatment program.
- A \$390 fine, plus over \$1,000 in ordinary penalty assessments and additional DUI-only assessments, for a total of approximately \$1,800.
- Completion of a \$500, three to nine month alcohol-treatment program, depending on your blood alcohol level at the time of your arrest.

## When to Seek Help

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People rarely admit how much they drink, or how drinking impacts their lives. If friends, family, or coworkers talk to you about your drinking, take their concerns seriously. See a doctor or mental health provider, or attend an AA meeting. Talk to someone you know who has been “on the wagon” for a while about their experience.

If your concern is for someone else, consider an “intervention” in which you and others close to that person confront them about their drinking. It's best to talk to an alcohol treatment professional before doing this. It's common for people with a mental health disorder such as anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, or bipolar disorder to develop substance abuse issues. If that is the case, treatment should be for a “dual diagnosis” and will address both the alcohol problem and underlying psychological issues.

### **SIGNS YOUR TEEN IS USING ALCOHOL**

The cumulative effects of long term excessive drinking may include one or more of the following:

- Changes in appetite or sleep patterns
- Sudden weight loss or weight gain
- Deterioration in personal grooming or physical appearance
- Impaired coordination and unexplained injuries
- Shakes, tremors, impaired or unstable coordination
- Seizures when there is no diagnosed seizure disorder
- Slurred or slowed speech, loud talking
- Problems at school, such as getting in trouble, skipping class, declining grades
- Loss of interest in extracurricular activities
- Missing money
- Acting unusually quiet and withdrawn or loud, belligerent, and argumentative
- Preoccupation with alcohol and drug-related lifestyle in music, clothing, and posters
- Demanding privacy, locking doors, avoiding eye contact
- Unfamiliar friends and hangouts