

Alcohol Problems

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The overuse or abuse of alcohol (alcoholism) or other drugs is called substance abuse. It is common and costly. It can cause or worsen many medical problems and destroy families and lives.

Alcohol abuse causes over 100,000 deaths in the United States and Canada each year. It is the drug most commonly abused by children ages 12 to 17. Alcohol-related motor vehicle accidents are the leading cause of death in teenagers. People who drink alcohol are more likely to engage in high-risk sexual behavior, have poor grades or job performance, use tobacco products, and experiment with illegal drugs. Alcohol and drug use may be an unconscious attempt at self-treatment for another problem, such as depression.

You have an alcohol problem if your use of alcohol interferes with your health or daily living. You develop alcoholism if you physically or emotionally depend on alcohol to get you through your day.

Long-term heavy drinking damages the liver, nervous system, heart, and brain [Click here to see an illustration..](#) It also causes high blood pressure, stomach problems, medicine interactions, sexual problems, osteoporosis, and cancer. Alcohol abuse can also lead to violence, accidents, social isolation, jail or prison time, and difficulties at work and home.

Symptoms of an alcohol problem include personality changes, blackouts, drinking more and more for the same "high," and denial of the problem. A person with an alcohol problem may gulp or sneak drinks, drink alone or early in the morning, and suffer from the shakes. He or she may also have family, school, or work problems or get in trouble with the law because of drinking.

The use of alcohol with medicines or illegal drugs may increase the

effects of each.

Alcohol abuse patterns vary. Some people get drunk every day; others drink large amounts of alcohol at specific times, such as on the weekend. It is common for someone with an alcohol or drug problem to call in sick for work on Monday or Friday. He or she may complain of having a virus or the flu. Others may be sober for long periods and then go on a drinking binge that lasts for weeks or months.

Someone with alcohol dependence may suffer serious withdrawal symptoms, such as trembling, delusions, hallucinations, and sweating, if he or she stops drinking suddenly ("cold turkey"). Once alcohol dependence develops, it becomes very difficult to stop drinking without outside help. Medical detoxification may be needed.

<http://www.stopdrinkingadvice.org/guide/>

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