



### April is Alcohol Awareness Month



Alcohol overuse is on the rise in the United States and Canada. People from every racial, social, and ethnic group, along with men and women of all ages, are at risk. Plainly stated, alcohol overuse can affect anyone.

Yet there are some risk factors that make certain people more likely to have a problem than others. People with a family history of an alcohol use disorder (mainly among males), depression, or anxiety are more likely to overuse it. Also children who grow up with adults who drink often are more likely to over use alcohol. Children who were not raised with drinkers are less likely to develop a drinking problem.

#### Social acceptance

Over the last 30 years alcohol use has become more common. At one time, drinking was reserved for special events such as weddings and holidays or to celebrate a success or anniversary. Getting drunk was frowned upon. Many people today don't wait for an event to drink, and equate getting drunk to having a good time. Many young people believe that drinking is the *only* way to have fun.

#### What is drinking in moderation?

The *American Medical Association* has defined drinking in moderation. For healthy men, this is no more than two

alcoholic drinks a day. For healthy women, it is no more than one drink per day. A drink is defined as a 12-ounce can of beer, five ounces of wine or 1.5 ounces of hard liquor. Keep in mind that certain people should avoid drinking, period. Such people include pregnant women, those who run machinery, people on certain medications and anyone under the age of 21. For most people, when drinking conflicts with their values or morality, the ensuing guilt and regret serves as a wake-up call. These painful emotions should lead to a good behavior change. For example, if a young man drank too much at a dinner party and flirted with his friend's wife, he should feel regret and shame. In this situation, most men would commit to limit their use of alcohol or stop drinking. But a person with an alcohol use disorder may make excuses and not accept that drinking had harmed his judgment. Continuing to drink in spite of bad results is a telltale sign of a serious alcohol problem.

#### Defining alcohol use disorder

There are many varying definitions of alcohol use disorder. Some define overuse by how much or how often someone drinks. One more way is to look at what happens to your life as a result of drinking. It is a pattern of drinking that leads to harmful results.

#### Signs of alcohol use disorder

- getting drunk
- lying about drinking
- lack of interest in family activities
- mood swings
- feeling too sad, angry, or nervous
- conflicts with family members about drinking
- failed tries to quit or cut back

- poor job performance, late, or absent often
- for students, a drop in grades and attendance
- legal problems such as traffic tickets, DUI, or arrests for alcohol-related conduct judgment, loose sexual behavior, cheating, unsafe, forceful, or violent actions

### **What is alcohol use disorder?**

Many people drink in moderation and never have problems. For others, drinking becomes a major part of their life. An alcohol use disorder includes high tolerance for drinking and withdrawal symptoms during periods of going without. A typical person with an alcohol use disorder will drink often enough to keep from going into withdrawal.

But, many experts believe that alcohol use disorders are not simply about tolerance, or physical dependence, or how much or how often someone drinks. For some, the better question is “what happens to your life when you drink?” World-renowned alcohol expert Mark Gold, M.D., observed that alcohol-dependent people “organize their life” around drinking. This is often at the cost of their other priorities.

Being drunk can harm anyone’s judgment and actions. For most people, when drinking conflicts with their values or morality, the ensuing guilt and regret serves as a wake-up call. These painful emotions should lead to a good behavior change. For example, if a young man drank too much at a dinner party and flirted with his friend’s wife, he should feel regret and shame. In this situation, most men would commit to limit their use of alcohol or stop drinking. But a person with an alcohol use disorder may make excuses and not accept that drinking had harmed his judgment. Continuing to drink in spite of bad results is a telltale sign of a serious alcohol problem.

### **The bottom line**

If drinking is causing conflicts in your life, talk with a friend or someone you trust. Ask them how they see you when you are drinking. If you need help, get it. Your family doctor, local mental health worker, or Alcoholics Anonymous Hotline are good places to start.

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**Clarissa Netter B.S., Peer Community Coordinator**

Clarissa Netter joined Beacon Health Options, Maryland in April as a Peer Community Coordinator. Clarissa is responsible for providing peer-based recovery support to persons enrolled in the public behavioral health system. Peer-based recovery support involves giving and receiving non-clinical assistance to help people achieve long term recovery. Clarissa will work primarily with people who need increased support to achieve recovery goals, build support networks, reduce unnecessary hospitalizations and live meaningful lives in their community. She is a person in long term recovery. She brings over 20 years of experience administering and providing peer related services at the local, state and national levels.

