

Responsible alcohol use

For your **safety**, for your **health**

While movies have traditionally depicted alcohol abuse as rampant among teenagers and college students, the problem actually extends across generational lines. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, alcohol is the largest substance use problem among older adults, too.

It's a safety issue

Alcohol is a central nervous system depressant that affects every organ in the body. Alcohol use slows reaction time, and impairs judgment and coordination. Alcohol abuse can cause people to behave abnormally, often in aggressive or violent ways. Workers under the influence of alcohol are more likely to cause an accident, and research shows that alcohol use increases the risk for both fatal and nonfatal injuries.

It's a health issue

Alcohol misuse is associated with several chronic conditions, such as liver cirrhosis, pancreatitis, high blood pressure, stroke, depression, and cancer. For pregnant women, any alcohol use at all can lead to birth defects and developmental disabilities.

What is responsible drinking?

Alcohol use affects everybody differently because of a variety of factors, such as age, weight, race, use of prescription medicines, and family histories. But in general, the Dietary Guidelines for Americans defines drinking in moderation to be no more than one drink per day for women and no more than two drinks per day for men. * They define a "drink" as:

- 12 ounces of beer
- 8 ounces of malt liquor
- 5 ounces of wine
- 1.5 ounces, or a "shot" of 80-proof liquor, such as gin, rum, vodka, or whiskey

* Note: The one- or two-drink guidelines are daily limits and not averages for multiple days (i.e. one beer daily for seven days falls within the guidelines, but six non-drinking days followed by seven beers in one day does not fall within the guidelines).

How to know if you have a problem

The most effective way to determine if you have a problem is to assess the role that alcohol is playing in your life. In general, you may have a problem if you:

- Spend a lot of time drinking, or become sick from drinking
- Cut back on enjoyable or important activities to give yourself more time to drink
- Suffer from withdrawal symptoms, such as trouble sleeping, shakiness, and nausea, after the effects from alcohol have worn off
- Have tried to cut down or stop drinking more than once, but failed
- Have family, friends, or co-workers expressing concern about your alcohol use

Consider attending a 12-step meeting, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, to further explore whether you may be dependent on alcohol.

For more information

Ask your health care provider or visit these Web sites:

- National Institutes of Health on Drinking: rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov
- Centers for Disease Control Alcohol FAQs: www.cdc.gov/Alcohol/faqs.htm#10



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