

Alcohol-Related Illnesses

Excessive consumption of alcohol can cause many negative health effects. “Excessive consumption” means more than two drinks per day for a man under 65 and more than one drink per day for a woman under 65. In the short-term, alcohol depresses the central nervous system, lowers inhibitions, impairs speech and reduces muscle coordination. In extreme amounts, alcohol can significantly depress the vital centers of the brain and can cause a coma.

Those who drink alcohol excessively on a regular basis may experience fatigue, short-term memory loss and many other adverse health effects, including:

- **Liver disorders**
 - Heavy drinking can cause alcoholic hepatitis (inflammation of the liver).
 - After years of drinking, hepatitis can lead to cirrhosis (scarring of the liver).
- **Gastrointestinal problems**
 - Excessive alcohol consumption can result in inflammation of the stomach lining, which interferes with the absorption of B vitamins.
 - Heavy drinking can also damage the pancreas, which regulates metabolism and

produces enzymes to help digest fats, proteins and carbohydrates.

- **Cardiovascular problems**
 - Heavy drinking can lead to high blood pressure and increase the risk of a heart attack.
- **Diabetes complications**
 - Alcohol can increase the risk of low blood sugar because it prevents the release of glucose from the liver. This is dangerous for those that have diabetes and already have problems with low blood sugar.
- **Sexual dysfunction and irregular menstruation**
 - Heavy alcohol consumers who are male are at risk of erectile dysfunction, and female heavy drinkers can suffer from interruptions in their menstruation cycles.
- **Birth defects**
 - Drinking alcohol while pregnant may cause fetal alcohol syndrome. This condition can cause the following birth problems: developmental disabilities, heart defects, shortening of the eye lids and small head.

- **Bone loss**
 - Alcohol can interfere with bone growth and increase the risk of fractures.
- **Neurological complications**
 - Heavy drinking can cause numbness in the hands and feet, and dementia.
- **Increased cancer risks**
 - Habitual alcohol use is linked to an increased risk of esophageal, laryngeal, liver and colon cancer.

In addition to the health risks of excessive alcohol consumption, alcohol abuse is also linked to:

- Domestic abuse and divorce
- Poor performance at work and school
- Higher risk of motor vehicle crashes and drunk driving
- Greater likelihood of other injuries as a result of being impaired by alcohol
- Higher incidence of suicide



Did You Know...?

Avoiding alcohol or drinking in moderation is essential in curbing your risk of developing alcohol-related illnesses. With increased age, the body breaks down alcohol more slowly, which increases its damaging effects.