

Let's Talk Facts About College Students and Alcohol Abuse



What is Alcohol Abuse and Dependence?

Alcohol abuse is when an individual experiences one or more of the following in a one year period:

- Recurrent use resulting in failure to fulfill major role obligations at home, school, or work.
- Recurrent use in dangerous situations such as continuing to drink heavily despite having frequent “blackouts.”
- Recurrent alcohol-related legal problems such as convictions for driving while intoxicated (DWI).
- Continued use despite social and interpersonal problems caused or worsened by alcohol.

Alcohol dependence is a more severe and less frequent diagnosis which is given when a person experiences three or more of the following in a one year period:

- Tolerance- increased amounts are needed to achieve the desired effect or a diminished effect from the same amount of alcohol.
- Withdrawal- includes symptoms such as sweating, increased heart rate, shaking, nausea/vomiting, or even more severe symptoms such as seizures and/or hallucinations.
- A great deal of time is spent trying to obtain alcohol, using it, or recovering from its effects.
- Important activities are given up or reduced because of alcohol.
- Drinking more or longer than intended.
- Persistent desire to drink or unsuccessful efforts to cut down or control alcohol use.
- Continued use despite diagnosis of a mental health disorder such as depression that is caused by or worsened by alcohol.

In general, college students should talk to a mental health professional about their alcohol intake if they:

- Drink everyday.
- Binge drink to get drunk.
- Think alcohol is interfering with school work and relationships.

What Causes Alcohol Abuse and Dependence?

It has been shown that alcohol abuse and dependence are likely due to a wide variety of environmental and biological factors similar to many other mental health disorders. The cultural traditions surrounding the use of alcohol in family, religious, and social settings, especially during childhood, can affect both alcohol use and the likelihood that alcohol problems may develop.

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How are Alcohol Abuse and Dependence Treated?

Treatment depends on the severity of the alcohol problem and the treatment resources that are available at an individual's higher education institution and local community. Treatment may include:

- Alcohol detoxification which is the procedure of safely getting alcohol out of your system by treating withdrawal symptoms.
- Prescription medications such as acamprosate, disulfiram, and naltrexone that have been shown to help prevent a relapse to drinking once drinking has stopped.
- Various types of counseling that teach alcohol abusers to identify situations and emotions that typically trigger their desire to drink and find new ways to cope that do not include alcohol use. These treatments are usually provided on an outpatient basis, and many are offered through university counseling centers throughout the country.
- Support of family members is important to the recovery process. Many people with alcohol problems have disturbed many of their closest relationships, and these have to be rebuilt.
- Free community and government programs, such as group support meetings, legal assistance or job training.

It is important to work with a mental health care provider to:

- Consider the positive benefits of stopping an unhealthy drinking pattern.
- Set a specific drinking goal. You may choose to abstain from alcohol or limit the amount that you drink in order to avoid negative legal and social consequences.
- Examine the situational triggers for unhealthy drinking patterns and determine new ways of tackling those trigger situations.

Students of legal age (>21) who consume alcohol should do so responsibly and in moderation. Unfortunately, many students engage in underage, risky drinking that could lead to long term alcohol problems. These patterns include binge drinking and heavy drinking on a regular basis. The health and social effects of alcohol misuse can be extremely serious and even life threatening both to the individual and to others.

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Resources

For more information, please contact:

American Psychiatric Association (APA)
1000 Wilson Blvd.
Suite 1825
Arlington, VA 22209
703-907-7300
www.healthyminds.org

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA)
Scientific Communications Branch
6000 Executive Boulevard, Willco Building, Suite 409
Bethesda, MD 20892-7003
(301) 443-3860
www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) World Services, Inc.
475 Riverside Drive, 11th Floor
New York, NY 10115
(212) 870-3400
www.aa.org

Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc.
1600 Corporate Landing Parkway
Virginia Beach, VA 23454-5617
757 - 563-1600
www.al-anon.alateen.org

National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc. (NCADD)
20 Exchange Place, Suite 2902
New York, NY 10005
Phone: (212) 269-7797
(800) NCA-CALL (24-hour Affiliate referral)
www.ncadd.org

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U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)
Start Talking Before They Start Drinking
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201
1-877-696-6775
www.stopalcoholabuse.gov

One in a series of pamphlets designed to reduce stigmas associated with mental illnesses by promoting informed factual discussion of the disorders and their psychiatric treatments. This brochure was developed for educational purposes and does not necessarily reflect opinion or policy of the American Psychiatric Association. For more information, please visit, www.healthyminds.org.