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September 14, 2009

# WELLNESS WEEKLY

## ALCOHOL AWARENESS

Alcohol abuse means having unhealthy or dangerous drinking habits, such as drinking every day or drinking too much at a time. Alcohol abuse can harm your relationships, cause you to miss work, and lead to legal problems such as driving while drunk (intoxicated). When you abuse alcohol, you continue to drink even though you know your drinking is causing problems. Alcoholism is defined as a chronic (long-term), progressive disease that includes alcohol cravings and continued drinking despite repeated alcohol-related problems, such as losing a job or getting into trouble with the law. Symptoms include cravings, impaired control, physical dependence, and increased tolerance. Left untreated, alcoholism can be fatal.

*You might be dependent on alcohol if you have three or more of the following problems in a year:*

- You cannot quit drinking or control how much you drink.
- You need to drink more to get the same effect.
- You have withdrawal symptoms when you stop drinking. These include feeling sick to your stomach, sweating, shakiness, and anxiety.
- You spend a lot of time drinking and recovering from drinking, or you have given up other activities so you can drink.
- You have tried to quit drinking or to cut back the amount you drink but haven't been able to.
- You continue to drink even though it harms your relationships and causes you to develop physical problems.

According to the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, almost 18 million Americans abuse alcohol. Almost three times as many men (9.8 million) as women (3.9 million) are problem drinkers and prevalence is highest for both sexes in the 18 to 29 years-old age group. Each year more than 100,000 Americans die of alcohol-related causes.



### *A few points on alcohol consumption to consider.*

Though moderate alcohol use seems to have some health benefits, anything more than moderate drinking can negate any potential benefits. Be cautious because excessive alcohol consumption can lead to serious health problems, including:

- Cancer of the pancreas, mouth, pharynx, larynx, esophagus and liver
- Pancreatitis, especially in people with high levels of triglycerides in their blood
- Sudden death in people with cardiovascular disease
- Heart muscle damage leading to heart failure
- Stroke
- High blood pressure
- Cirrhosis of the liver
- Miscarriage
- Fetal alcohol syndrome
- Injuries due to impaired motor skills
- Suicide

People with certain health conditions shouldn't drink any alcohol, as even small amounts could cause problems. Also, alcohol interacts with many common prescription and over-the-counter medications. If you combine alcohol with aspirin, you face an increased risk of gastrointestinal bleeding. And if you use alcohol and acetaminophen, you increase your risk of liver damage.

If you feel you have an alcohol problem, get help. Visit a doctor or go to a self-help group. The earlier you get help, the easier it will be to cut back or quit. Above all, don't feel pressured to drink. If you do drink and you're healthy, drink responsibly and in moderation.