

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 acamprostate, 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:

1. Consider the positive benefits of stopping an unhealthy drinking pattern.
2. 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.
3. 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

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Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) occurs in individuals who have survived a severe or terrifying physical or emotional event. People with PTSD may have recurrent nightmares, intrusive memories, or even have flashbacks, where the event seems to be happening all over again. They feel extreme distress when in circumstances that remind them of the trauma, and go to extremes to avoid these situations. Additional symptoms include:

- Feeling numb or detached
- Trouble sleeping
- Feeling jittery or on guard
- Irritability

Events that can trigger PTSD include military combat, a violent personal attack, natural disasters, tragedies (e.g., plane crash), physical or sexual abuse during childhood, or witnessing another person's serious injury.

Generalized Anxiety Disorder

People with generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) have ongoing, severe tension that interferes with daily functioning. They worry constantly and feel helpless to control these worries. Often their worries focus on job responsibilities, family health, or minor matters such as chores, car repairs, or appointments. They may have problems sleeping, muscle aches/tension, and feel shaky, weak and headachy. People with GAD can be irritable and often have problems concentrating and working effectively.

What Causes Anxiety Disorders?

The causes of anxiety disorders are currently unknown, although research has provided several clues. Areas of the brain that control fear responses may have a role in some anxiety disorders. Anxiety disorders can run in families, suggesting that a combination of genes and environmental stresses can produce the disorders. The role of brain chemistry is also being investigated.

Treatment

Although each anxiety disorder has its own unique characteristics, most respond well to two types of treatment: psychotherapy and medications. These treatments can be given alone or in combination. Treatment can give significant relief from symptoms, but not always a complete cure.

There are several effective medications and psychotherapies. Because treatment often requires several weeks to work best, a psychiatrist should follow the patient's progress and make necessary changes.

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Unfortunately, many people with anxiety disorders don't seek help. They don't realize that they have an illness that has known causes and effective treatments. Other people fear their family, friends or coworkers might criticize them if they get help. If you or someone you know have any of the symptoms in this pamphlet, consult a psychiatrist, non-psychiatric physician, or other mental health professional for a thorough examination.

Resources

For more information, please contact:

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

Anxiety Disorders Association of America (ADAA)
8730 Georgia Avenue, Suite 600
Silver Spring, MD 20910, USA
240-485-1001
www.adaa.org

National Mental Health Association (NMHA)
2001 N. Beauregard Street, 12th Floor
Alexandria, Virginia 22311
800-969-NMHA (6642)
www.nmha.org

National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI)
Colonial Place Three
2107 Wilson Blvd., Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201-3042
703-524-7600
Information Helpline: 1-800-950-NAMI (6264)
www.nami.org

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.