

April marks an entire month devoted to Alcohol Awareness and, though drinking is legal and accepted in our society, it does not disavow the personal and social problems directly associated with alcohol use. In fact, social media reports a significant increase in alcohol sales and consumption during the COVID-19 pandemic, Stay at Home situation. Excessive drinking are significant public health problems, and it has a significant impact on the quality of life for many individuals.

So, here are some Signs and Risk Factors of Excessive use of Alcohol:

Drinking often impairs judgment. Poor judgment and decision making can lead to high risk behaviors such as drinking and driving, unprotected sex, domestic violence, sexual assault and aggressive behavior.

Alcohol can inhibit brain development and function. Research shows that people who begin drinking before the age of 15 are four times more likely to suffer from more serious, alcohol-related health concerns later in life, including alcohol addiction.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), which conducts the annual National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), defines binge drinking as 5 or more alcoholic drinks for males or 4 or more alcoholic drinks for females on the same occasion (i.e., at the same time or within a couple of hours of each other) on at least 1 day in the past month.

The U.S. Dietary Guidelines recommend that if alcohol is consumed, it should be in moderation, defined as up to one drink per day for women and up to two drinks per day for men, and only by adults of legal drinking age. However, some individuals should avoid alcohol completely.

Alcohol use disorder (AUD) is a condition that clinicians diagnose when an individual's drinking causes distress or harm. The condition can range from mild to severe and is diagnosed when an individual answers "yes" to two or more of the following questions.

In the past year, have you:

- Had times when you ended up drinking **more, or longer** than you intended?
- More than once wanted to **cut down or stop drinking**, or tried to, but couldn't?
- Spent a **lot of time** drinking? Or being sick or getting over the aftereffects?
- Experienced **craving** — a strong need, or urge, to drink?

- Found that drinking — or being sick from drinking — often **interfered with taking care of your home or family**? Or caused **job** troubles? Or **school** problems?
- Continued to drink even though it was causing **trouble** with your **family** or **friends**?
- **Given up** or **cut back** on **activities** that were important or interesting to you, or gave you pleasure, in order to drink?
- More than once gotten into situations while or after drinking that **increased your chances of getting hurt** (such as driving, swimming, using machinery, walking in a dangerous area, or having unsafe sex)?
- Continued to drink even though it was making you feel **depressed or anxious** or adding to **another health problem**? Or after having had a **memory blackout**?
- Had to **drink much more** than you once did to **get the effect** you want? Or found that your **usual number** of drinks had **much less effect** than before?
- Found that when the effects of alcohol were wearing off, you **had withdrawal symptoms**, such as trouble sleeping, shakiness, irritability, anxiety, depression, restlessness, nausea, or sweating? Or sensed things that were not there?

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If you have any of these symptoms, your drinking may already be a cause for concern. The more symptoms you have, the more urgent the need for change. A health professional can conduct a formal assessment of your symptoms to see if an alcohol use disorder is present. For an online assessment of your drinking pattern, go to [RethinkingDrinking.niaaa.nih.gov](https://www.rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov).

How do I know when is time for treatment?

- Are you having alcohol-related problems?
- Are you struggling with controlling your drinking?
- Is alcohol interfering with family activities or work related tasks?
- Have family members or friends commented on your drinking?
- Changes in my health associated with alcohol use?
- Blackouts, withdrawal symptoms, obsessive and compulsive behaviors associated with alcohol?

There is hope, no matter how severe the problem may seem, most people with an alcohol use disorder can benefit from some form of treatment.

There are a variety of treatment methods currently available. However, there is no one-size-fits-all solution, and what may work for one person may not be a good fit for someone else. For anyone thinking about treatment, talking to a Certified Substance Abuse Counselor (CSAC) or a License Substance Abuse Treatment Provider (LSATP) is an important first step. In addition your Primary Care Provider (PCP) can be a good source for treatment referrals and medications.

There are also mutual support groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and other 12-step programs. These support groups provide peer support for people quitting or cutting back on their drinking. Combined with treatment support groups can offer a valuable added layer of support.

Resources

Bridge to Wellness Centers LLC. www.bridgetowellnesscenters.com

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) www.aa.org

SMART Recovery www.smartrecovery.org

Women for Sobriety www.womenforsobriety.org

Al-Anon Family Groups www.al-anon.alateen.org

1-888-425-2666

Adult Children of Alcoholics www.adultchildren.org

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information

www.samhsa.gov 1-800-729-6686

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

www.niaaa.nih.gov 301-443-3860