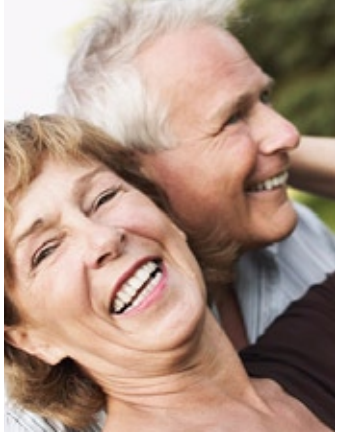

# Wellness Monthly

Healthy matters to keep in mind.

April 2010

## "It's Just a Couple of Drinks."

### The Truth about Alcohol Addiction

**Many people enjoy a beer after work or like a glass of wine with dinner. And most people can drink a moderate amount of alcohol without trouble. That means up to two drinks per day for men and one drink per day for women and older people, according to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.**[1]

But there are people who cannot drink within sensible limits. They become addicted. In the United States, one out of 12 people abuses alcohol.[1]

#### What Is Alcoholism?

Alcoholism is a chronic disease. Someone who is addicted to alcohol:

- Has an uncontrollable urge to drink
- Can't stop drinking once he or she has started
- Has physical withdrawal symptoms (nausea, sweating, shaking) after stopping
- Needs increasing amounts of alcohol[1]

Problem drinking can break up families. An alcoholic may lose his or her job. He or she may go into debt or even become homeless. Their health often suffers. But an alcoholic keeps drinking because he or she simply cannot stop.

#### The Risks of Alcohol Addiction

People who abuse alcohol are at risk for:

- Medical problems such as anemia, ulcers and liver damage
- Financial and legal problems
- Domestic violence
- Sexually transmitted diseases

And if a pregnant women drinks alcohol, her baby may be born with abnormal facial features and learning difficulties.

#### Getting Help

The good news is that alcoholism is treatable. First, the problem drinker must be willing to get help. A trained counselor can help. The alcoholic may need medical treatment.

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## Upcoming Articles

**May 2010**
Helping Someone Seek Help

**June 2010**
Coping with Serious Illness

## Does Alcoholism Run in Families?

Research shows that children and grandchildren of alcoholics are more likely to have alcohol problems — in fact, about four times more likely than the general population.[2] But children of alcoholics are not doomed to a life of addiction. In fact, over half the children of alcoholics can and do drink sensibly or not at all. Here are some practical ways to reduce the risks:

- Avoid underage drinking.
- Drink moderately, or not at all, as an adult.
- Share your family health history with your health care professional.
- Do not drink if you are pregnant or trying to become pregnant.

Of course, alcohol is never OK for children and young people under 21.

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They may need to stay in a treatment center for days or weeks. Twelve-step support groups like Alcoholics Anonymous can help the recovering addict focus on staying sober. Family therapy can begin the healing process.

If you are worried about a loved one's drinking habits, remember that covering up for them doesn't help in the long run. Honesty is the first step on the road to recovery. Choose a time when your loved one is not drinking, and talk it over as calmly as you can. If they agree to get help, call your health provider right away.

Recovering from alcohol addiction is not easy, but it is possible. We are here to help. Call or log on any time for help with any of life's challenges.

## Help Your Child Decide Not to Drink

Attention, Mom and Dad: 71% of teens told a Roper poll that their parents are their first influence when it comes to drinking alcohol.[3] This means now is the time to talk to your kids about the dangers of underage drinking.

1. **Give them the facts.** Underage drinking is illegal. It can lead to auto accidents, poor grades, health problems, and even date rape.
2. **Be a good role model.** When it comes to alcohol, your example speaks louder than your words.
3. **Set clear rules.** Make sure your kids know your household rules and the consequences for breaking them.
4. **Provide support.** Tell your kids you will always pick them up, no questions asked, if they call for help.
5. **Don't be afraid to ask:** Where are you going? Who will you be with? How are you getting home?

Your children will experience peer pressure throughout their lives. They have a better chance of standing up to it if they know you are standing behind them.

## Resources

**www.liveandworkwell.com**

**Ask your HR representative for your access code and toll-free number.**

Visit the Alcohol & Drug Abuse/ Dependence Condition Center to learn more about alcohol-related conditions, their treatment and what you can do to help yourself.

The information and therapeutic approaches in this article are provided for educational purposes only and are not meant to be used in place of professional clinical consultations for individual health needs. Certain treatments may not be covered in some benefit plans. Check your health plan regarding your coverage of services. We do not endorse any particular third-party Web site but simply offers examples of some of the more common sites available.

1 National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. FAQs for the General Public. Available at http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/FAQs/General.
2 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. A Family History of Alcoholism, Are You At Risk?
3 Bonnie RJ and O'Connell ME, editors. National Research Council and Institute of Medicine. Reducing Underage Drinking: A Collective Responsibility. Committee on Developing a Strategy to Reduce and Prevent Underage Drinking. Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press; 2004.

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