

Alcohol Abuse and Dependence Information, Teen

Alcohol is a widely available drug. In the U.S., it is legal for people who are 21 and older. People who drink alcohol often and in large amounts often have problems during or after drinking. They may develop what is called an alcohol use disorder.

There are two main types of alcohol use disorders:

- Alcohol abuse. This is when you use alcohol too much or too often. You may use alcohol to make yourself feel happy or to reduce stress. You may have a hard time setting a limit on the amount you drink.
- Alcohol dependence. This is when you use alcohol consistently for a period of time, and your body changes as a result. This can make it hard to stop drinking because you may start to feel sick or different when you do not use alcohol. These symptoms are known as withdrawal..

How does alcohol abuse and dependence affect me?

Drinking alcohol is a big temptation for teens and young adults. It is often considered a game, a way to have fun, or a way to let go of inhibitions. Teens who drink alcohol can become dependent and addicted more quickly than adults. Becoming addicted to alcohol can affect your future by putting you at risk for:

- Permanent injuries.
- Medical problems that will last your entire life.
- Overdose and death.
- A criminal record that may limit your ability to get a good job or go to college.

Alcohol abuse and dependence can have a negative effect on your life. Regularly using alcohol may lead to an addiction. You may feel like you need alcohol to function normally. This may lead to actions such as stealing, lying, or breaking the law to get alcohol. These actions can result in:

- A criminal record or jail time.
- Suspension from school and sports teams.
- Losing the trust and respect of friends and family.

Drinking heavily over a long period of time can permanently damage your body and cause lifelong health issues, such as:

- Damage to your liver or pancreas.
- Heart problems, high blood pressure, or stroke.
- Certain cancers.
- Decreased ability to fight infections.
- Brain or nerve damage.
- Depression.
- Early (*premature*) death.

If you are careless or you crave alcohol, it is easy to drink more than your body can handle (overdose). Alcohol overdose is a serious situation that requires hospitalization and often leads to permanent injuries or death.

What can increase my risk?

- Having a family history of alcohol abuse.
- Having depression or other mental health conditions.
- Beginning to drink at an early age.
- Binge drinking often.
- Experiencing trauma, stress, and an unstable home life during childhood.
- Spending time with friends or classmates who drink often.

What actions can I take to prevent or manage alcohol abuse and dependence?

- **Do not** drink alcohol. This is the best way to avoid alcohol abuse, dependence, and addiction.
- **Do not** participate in drinking competitions or games. They are very dangerous.
- **Do not** drink to cope with stress. Choose other ways to manage stress, such as talking with friends, exercising, meditating, or listening to music.
- Stop drinking if you are able. Drinking can cause damage in your brain or your body. If you think that you have a problem with drinking, talk with a trusted adult, such as a counselor, teacher, coach, or health care provider.
- You may have trouble stopping drinking if you are addicted or dependent. If you begin to have withdrawal symptoms, talk with your health care provider or a person that you trust. These symptoms may include anxiety, shaky hands, headache, nausea, sweating, or not being able to sleep.
- If your friends drink, spend time with others who do not drink alcohol. Make new friends who do not use alcohol.
- Find activities that you can do with friends instead of drinking, like games, hobbies, or exercise.
- **Do not** be afraid to say no if someone offers you alcohol. Speak up about why you do not want to drink. You can be a positive role model for your friends and set a good example for those around you by not drinking alcohol.



Where to find support

- Your school counselor, teacher, or health care provider may be able to help you find a program for teens and young adults.
- Talk with your parents or another trusted adult to help you find a counselor who works with teens.
- Your health care provider can help you find a therapist or program that may work for you.

Where to find more information

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov
- Partnership for Drug-Free Kids: drugfree.org/get-help

Contact a health care provider if:

- You have ever ended up drinking more or for longer than you intended, and you are worried about it.
- You tried to stop drinking or to reduce how much you drink, but you were not able to. You fear losing control.
- You often feel sick because of alcohol.

- You want to drink so badly that you cannot think about anything else.
- Drinking has created problems in your life.
- You have stopped doing things you used to enjoy in order to drink.
- You have to drink more and more to get the effect you want.

Get help right away if:

- You have thoughts about hurting yourself or others.
- You have serious withdrawal symptoms, including:
 - Confusion
 - Racing heart.
 - High blood pressure
 - Fever

If you ever feel like you may hurt yourself or others, or have thoughts about taking your own life, get help right away. You can go to your nearest emergency department or call:

- Your local emergency services (911 in the U.S.).
- A suicide crisis helpline, such as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255. This is open 24 hours a day.

Summary

- Drinking alcohol is a big temptation for teens and young adults. It is often considered a game, a way to have fun, or a way to let go of inhibitions.
- Alcohol abuse and dependence can have a negative effect on your life. Regularly using alcohol may lead to an addiction. You may feel like you need alcohol to function normally. This may lead to actions such as stealing, lying, or breaking the law to get alcohol.
- Drinking can cause damage in your brain or your body. Stop drinking if you are able.
- Your parents, your health care provider, a school counselor, or a coach may be able to help you find support to stop drinking.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.