

Alcohol Abuse



The term *alcohol* refers to beer, wine, and liquor. Alcohol abuse is the excessive consumption of any of these beverages.

The use of alcohol affects the brain's control center. Because of this, a person who drinks too much alcohol may experience difficulty with walking and other everyday tasks. A person may also behave in a way he or she would never behave when not under the influence of alcohol.

Many health problems are associated with alcohol abuse. For example, heavy use of alcohol can cause liver damage and may result in cirrhosis. Cirrhosis of the liver destroys liver cells and forms scar tissue. It can lead to liver failure and death. Alcohol abuse can also cause cardiomyopathy and arrhythmia. Cardiomyopathy is the improper growth or weakening of the heart muscle. Heart arrhythmias are irregular heartbeats that can cause high blood pressure and stroke. Alcohol abuse can also harm the stomach, the mouth, the throat, and can even result in brain damage. Pregnant women who drink put their babies at risk of developing fetal alcohol syndrome, a group of various birth defects that can result from consumption of alcohol during pregnancy.

Excessive alcohol use can damage a person's ability to reason and make good judgements. Because of this, it can lead to behavior that puts others at risk as well and it can contribute to the occurrence of violence and suicide.

You will be physically and mentally healthier if you choose not to drink. You will also be more likely to achieve academic and career goals, and your problem-solving skills will be sharper. Making responsible decisions about alcohol use improves self-esteem and shows respect and concern for the well-being of others.

Match each term below with its definition by writing the correct letter in the blank.

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| 1. ____ cardiomyopathy | a. group of birth defects caused by a mother's use of alcohol during pregnancy |
| 2. ____ cirrhosis | b. disease that can result from liver damage caused by excessive alcohol use |
| 3. ____ arrhythmia | c. improper growth or weakening of the heart muscle |
| 4. ____ fetal alcohol syndrome | d. irregular heartbeat |

5. How can alcohol abuse lead to other kinds of risky behavior?

6. Imagine that a friend spends the night at your house while your parents are away. Your friend encourages you to drink your parents' liquor. What is your response?
