

TYPES OF ALCOHOL PROBLEMS

Alcohol abuse:

This means drinking so much that it creates problems for yourself or others. Signs of harmful drinking include:

- work/school: losing time off work or school, or being unable to do your work properly, because of drinking during the day, or hangovers;
- family and friends: spending money on alcohol rather than on food, rent and other necessities; leaving children alone while you go out drinking; getting into arguments and fights because of drinking; friends or family members making comments that you drink too much;
- accidents, injuries and getting yourself into dangerous circumstances because of drinking (e.g., falling asleep with a cigarette burning or the stove on, falling down, going out into bad weather without proper clothes, etc.);
- problems with police because of drinking (drunk driving, being put in the ‘drunk tank’, creating a disturbance or assaulting others when drunk, etc.);
- health problems because of heavy drinking (for example, stomach problems, hangovers)
- getting drunk every time you drink
- not remembering what you did or said when you’d been drinking;
- being embarrassed about something you said or did when you were drinking;
- having thoughts that maybe you shouldn’t drink so much.

If you’ve had even one of these things happen once, it means you had way too much to drink that time.

If you’re having even one of these things happening more often, you need to take a close look at your drinking. These kinds of drinking consequences lead to even more problems in work, in family relationships, and in physical health. They will also affect your self-esteem and your reputation in the community.

If you want to drink sometimes, you can learn to drink in a way that doesn’t cause these consequences. But it means you really have to pay attention to your drinking, and learn to say ‘no’ to friends sometimes, and plan some other ways to have fun but still socialize.

Binge drinking:

This is a kind of alcohol abuse pattern where you don't drink all the time...you may not drink for days or weeks or even months...but when you do drink, you drink so much you get drunk.

This is the kind of alcohol abuse that leads to some of the most serious problems:

- fights and violence at home or in the community
- end up in the drunk tank or other trouble with the police
- get hurt or have an accident
- so hungover the next day you can't get to work or school or hunting

Drinking like this doesn't mean you're addicted. It does mean you're drinking in a very bad way.

You can change this way of drinking, although you'll have to pay close attention to your own drinking behaviour and work really actively to change the pattern. You're used to drinking like this, and when we're used to doing something in a certain way, it takes time and work to change.

Psychological dependence / Heavy drinking as a habit:

Often, we can get into the habit of drinking too much or too often. If your friends drink a lot, you may do the same. If you've started using drinking as a way to relax when you're stressed, it can be easy to make drinking a regular habit whenever you feel the need to relax or forget about problems. If you feel less shy or less depressed when you're drinking, you may start using alcohol every time you feel nervous or sad. Eventually, when you're in these situations, you'll feel like you *need* to drink.

It's a good idea to pay attention to the situations in which you drink. Who am I with? How do I feel before I drink? How do I feel when I've had a couple? How often do I drink too much and in what situations? And so on.....once you have an idea of your own patterns, it'll be easier to start working at change.

Alcohol dependence:

This means that a person's body and brain need alcohol in order for the person to feel OK.

People who are dependent may have all or some of the same problems that happen in alcohol abuse. But they also start to feel bad when they don't have alcohol....they get anxious and get a strong feeling that they really really need to have a drink. They may also spend a lot of time thinking about and planning where and when they're going to be able to get the next drink.

In addition to the problems mentioned above, two of the important signs of physical dependence are:

- People who are dependent have usually developed a higher tolerance for alcohol. This means that their bodies and brains are so used to the alcohol that they can drink quite a bit more than other people before they start to show the effects. **You may be quite proud of the fact that you've 'learned to handle alcohol'... that even though you've had twice as much to drink as everybody else, you're still up and dancing when everyone else has passed out. However, this is a sign that you, your body and your brain are probably in danger.**
- Another major sign of severe dependence is having withdrawal symptoms when the person stops drinking. Withdrawal symptoms can include things like shaking, hallucinations, and seizures. People who are dependent may have to have a drink in order to stop these things from happening.

People who are dependent need to see a doctor, who will help make arrangements for 'drying out'.

IMPORTANT: If you have developed dependence to the point that you get symptoms like this when you stop drinking, SEE A DOCTOR. Withdrawal can be life-threatening.

A person's body/brain will get over the physical dependence in a few days. But a person who has been dependent is at risk of starting to drink too much again. They became dependent in the first place because they got into a pattern of drinking too often and too much. Maybe they used drinking as a regular way to relax....or heavy drinking was the accepted way of socializing with friends....or it was a way of dealing with depression and life problems. So if the person has used alcohol in these situations, s/he'll be really tempted to use again in similar situations, even if the physical dependence is over with.

Anyone in this situation should learn to recognize what their 'drinking triggers' are....and then develop ways of reducing their effect.

Nobody really knows yet why some people get dependent. But dependence can happen when you regularly drink a lot over a long time... you should follow the guidelines to keep your drinking low and reduce risk.