



AMERICAN  
PSYCHIATRIC  
ASSOCIATION

### **Let's Talk Facts About College Students and Alcohol Abuse. What Is Alcohol Abuse and Dependence?**

Alcohol abuse is when an individual experiences one or more of the following in a one-year period:

- Recurrent use resulting in failure to fulfill major role obligations at home, school or work.
- Recurrent use in dangerous situations, such as continuing to drink heavily despite having frequent "blackouts."
- Recurrent alcohol-related legal problems such as convictions for driving while intoxicated (DWI).
- Continued use despite social and interpersonal problems caused or worsened by alcohol.

Alcohol dependence is a more severe and less frequent diagnosis that is given when a person experiences three or more of the following in a one-year period:

- Tolerance - increased amounts are needed to achieve the desired effect or a diminished affect from the same amount of alcohol.
- Withdrawal - includes symptoms such as sweating, increased heart rate, shaking, nausea/vomiting, or even more severe symptoms such as seizures and/or hallucinations.
- A great deal of time is spent trying to obtain alcohol, using it or recovering from its effects.
- Important activities are given up or reduced because of alcohol.
- Drinking more or longer than intended.
- Persistent desire to drink or unsuccessful efforts to cut down or control alcohol use.
- Continued use despite diagnosis of a mental health disorder, such as depression that is caused by or worsened by alcohol.

In general, college students should talk to a mental health professional about their alcohol intake if they:

- Drink everyday.
- Binge drink to get drunk.
- Think alcohol is interfering with schoolwork and relationships.

### **What Causes Alcohol Abuse and Dependence?**

Similar to many other mental health disorders, alcohol abuse and dependence are likely due to a wide variety of environmental and biological factors. The cultural traditions surrounding the use of

alcohol in family, religious and social settings, especially during childhood, can affect both alcohol use and the likelihood that alcohol problems may develop.

### **How Are Alcohol Abuse and Dependence Treated?**

Treatment depends on the severity of the alcohol problem and the treatment resources that are available at an individual's higher education institution and local community. Treatment may include:

- Alcohol detoxification, which is the procedure of safely getting alcohol out of your system by treating withdrawal symptoms.
- Prescription medications such as acamprosate, disulfiram and naltrexone that have been shown to help prevent a relapse to drinking once drinking has stopped.
- Various types of counseling that teach alcohol abusers to identify situations and emotions that typically trigger their desire to drink and find new ways to cope that do not include alcohol use. These treatments are usually provided on an outpatient basis, and many are offered through university counseling centers throughout the country.
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- Support of family members, which is important to the recovery process. Many people with alcohol problems have disturbed many of their closest relationships, and these have to be rebuilt.
- Free community and government programs, such as group support meetings, legal assistance or job training.

It is important to work with a mental health care provider to:

- Consider the positive benefits of stopping an unhealthy drinking pattern.
- Set a specific drinking goal. You may choose to abstain from alcohol or limit the amount that you drink in order to avoid negative legal and social consequences.
- Examine the situational triggers for unhealthy drinking patterns and determine new ways of tackling those trigger situations.

Students of legal age (age 21 and older) who consume alcohol should do so responsibly and in moderation. Unfortunately, many students engage in underage, risky drinking that could lead to long-term alcohol problems. These patterns include binge drinking and heavy drinking on a regular basis. The health and social effects of alcohol misuse can be extremely serious and even life threatening both to the individual and to others.

### **Additional Resources**

American Psychiatric Association  
1000 Wilson Blvd., Suite 1825  
Arlington, VA 22209  
(703) 907-7300  
Internet: [www.healthyminds.org](http://www.healthyminds.org)

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism  
Scientific Communications Branch  
6000 Executive Blvd.  
Willco Building, Suite 409

Bethesda, MD 20892-7003  
(301) 443-3860  
Internet: [www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov](http://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov)

Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration  
1 Choke Cherry Road  
Rockville, MD 20857  
240-276-2420  
<http://www.samhsa.gov>

Stop Alcohol Abuse  
[www.stopalcoholabuse.gov](http://www.stopalcoholabuse.gov)

Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.  
475 Riverside Dr., 11th Floor  
New York, NY 10115  
(212) 870-3400  
Internet: [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org)

Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc.  
1600 Corporate Landing Parkway  
Virginia Beach, VA 23454-5617  
757 - 563-1600  
Internet: [www.al-anon.alateen.org](http://www.al-anon.alateen.org)

National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc.  
20 Exchange Place, Suite 2902  
New York, NY 10005  
(212) 269-7797 or 1-800-NCA-CALL  
Internet: [www.ncadd.org](http://www.ncadd.org)