

Alcohol Use: Do You Know All of the Risks?

If you are like many people, you may drink alcohol occasionally. Or, like others, you may drink moderate amounts of alcohol on a more regular basis. If you are a woman or someone over the age of 65, moderate consumption means you have no more than one drink per day; if you are a man, moderate consumption means you have no more than two drinks per day. Drinking at these levels usually is not associated with health risks

But did you know that even moderate drinking, under certain circumstances, could be risky? If you drink at more than moderate levels, sometimes referred to as hazardous drinking, you may be putting yourself at risk for serious problems with your health as well as problems with family and friends

Drinking alcohol while taking certain medications can cause problems. In fact, there are more than 150 medications that should not be mixed with alcohol. For example, if you are taking certain cold or allergy medications and drink alcohol, the alcohol may increase the drowsiness that the medicine alone can cause, making driving or operating machinery even more dangerous. Check with your doctor or pharmacist before drinking any amount of alcohol if you are taking any over-the-counter or prescription medicines.

The potential for problems at home, with friends, and even with strangers increases as a person drinks more heavily. These problems may include:

- Arguments with or separation from your spouse and other family members.
- Increased chance of accidents or falls.
- Committing or being the victim of violence.

In addition, there are other health risks associated with drinking, since alcohol affects nearly every organ in the body. Some problems can occur after drinking over a relatively short period of time. But other problems such as liver disease, heart disease, certain forms of cancer, and pancreatitis often develop more gradually and may become evident only after many years of heavy drinking. Women develop alcohol-related health problems sooner than men, and from drinking less alcohol than men.

Source of above information: National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (Printed with Permission) <http://www.niaaa.nih.gov>.

The AUDIT-C© is a screening tool that can help identify people who are hazardous drinkers or may have other problems with alcohol.

Question 1: How often did you have a drink containing alcohol in the past year?

- Never (0 points)
- Monthly or less (1 point)

- Two to four times a month (2 points)
- Two to three times per week (3 points)
- Four or more times per week (4 points)

Question 2: How many drinks did you have on a typical day when you were drinking in the past year?

- 1 or 2 (0 points)
- 3 or 4 (1 point)
- 5 or 6 (2 points)
- 7 to 9 (3 points)
- 10 or more (4 points)

Question 3: How often did you have six or more drinks on one occasion in the past year?

- Never (0 points)
- Less than monthly (1 point)
- Monthly (2 points)
- Weekly (3 points)
- Daily or almost daily (4 points)

A score of 4 or more is considered positive for men; in women a score of 3 or more is considered positive. Generally, the higher your score is, the more likely it is that your drinking could be affecting your health and safety.

If you have a positive score on the AUDIT-C, or think you may have a problem with alcohol, or even just want to learn more about drug or alcohol abuse, please talk to your PCP or contact UPMC Health Plan Behavioral Health Services at 1-888-251-0083. Our regular office hours are Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. In urgent or emergency situations, staff is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. (TTY Line: 1-877-877-3580). We can assist you with getting the help or information you need to reduce the risks of alcohol related health problems.

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