



Alcohol Use Disorder

Alcohol use contributes to common health problems. Heavy alcohol use can increase the odds for injuries and other acute problems, as well as chronic illnesses such as liver disease, hypertension and depression.

FAST FACTS

- According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), excessive alcohol use is a leading cause of preventable death in the United States.
- In the United States, there are about 178,000 deaths each year from excessive alcohol use.
- Among U.S. adults aged 20 to 49, an estimated 1 in 5 deaths are from excessive alcohol use.
- [Adolescents](#) are four times more likely to drink alcohol if their parents binge drink.

HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?

Risky drinking vs. binge drinking vs. alcohol use disorder:

Standard drink sizes are defined as 12 oz. of beer (5% alcohol by volume), 5 oz. of wine (12% alcohol by volume) and 1.5 oz. of liquor (40% alcohol by volume).

- **Risky Drinking:**
 - Men >14 drinks in one week
 - Women >7 drinks in one week
- **Binge Drinking:**
 - Men >4 drinks per day
 - Women >3 drinks per day
- **Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD):**
 - A chronic, relapsing medical condition characterized by an inability to stop or control alcohol use despite the negative consequences it has on all areas of one's life. The severity of the condition can range from mild to severe, with addiction often referring to the more severe end of the spectrum.

<https://americanaddictioncenters.org/alcohol>

WHAT ARE THE TYPES OF TREATMENT FOR ALCOHOL USE DISORDER?

Several evidence-based treatment approaches are available for AUD. One size does not fit all and a treatment approach that may work for one person may not work for another. Treatment can be outpatient and/or inpatient and be provided by specialty programs, therapists and health care providers.

MEDICATIONS

Three medications are currently approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to help people stop or reduce their drinking and prevent a return to drinking: naltrexone (oral and long-acting injectable), acamprosate and disulfiram. All these medications are nonaddictive, and they may be used alone or combined with behavioral treatments or mutual-support groups.

BEHAVIORAL TREATMENTS

Behavioral treatments — also known as alcohol counseling or talk therapy, and provided by licensed therapists — are aimed at changing drinking behavior. Examples of behavioral treatments are brief interventions and reinforcement approaches, treatments that build motivation and teach skills for coping and preventing a return to drinking, and mindfulness-based therapies.

MUTUAL-SUPPORT GROUPS

Mutual-support groups provide peer support for stopping or reducing drinking. Group meetings are available in most communities at low or no cost, and at convenient times and locations — including a growing number of online meetings. This means they can be especially helpful to individuals at risk for return to drinking. Combined with medications and behavioral treatment provided by health care professionals, mutual-support groups can offer a valuable added layer of support.

- Alcoholic Anonymous: www.aa.org
- Al-Anon Family Groups: <https://al-anon.org>

Please note: People with severe AUD may need medical help to avoid alcohol withdrawal if they decide to stop drinking. Alcohol withdrawal is a potentially life-threatening process that can occur when someone who has been drinking heavily for a prolonged period of time suddenly stops drinking. Doctors can prescribe medications to address these symptoms and make the process safer and less distressing.

If you feel that you may have an issue with alcohol, please talk with your doctor.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Understanding Alcohol Use Disorder | National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism \(NIAAA\)](#)