



Alcohol

And Your Health

Introduction

Alcohol, when used in moderation and as part of a healthy lifestyle, can have beneficial effects for some people, particularly in the prevention of heart disease. However excessive drinking is harmful.

A person who consumes too much alcohol may become preoccupied with it. You can develop a craving and begin to drink more frequently, usually more than what you meant to. More and more alcohol is needed to achieve the sensation that alcohol used to provide. This process does not happen overnight; it slowly builds up over time and can lead to difficulties in the areas of work, family, friends and finances.

Effects on physical and mental health

Malnutrition and obesity

Heavy drinkers tend to put on weight; yet suffer from malnutrition and lack of fitness. This happens when they replace food with alcoholic drinks and pay less attention to nutrition.

Risk of alcohol-related accidents

At work, alcohol can make you sleepy, inefficient and a danger to yourself and colleagues. There is a risk of alcohol-related accidents at the workplace.





Injury and death can result from risky behaviour such as drink driving and unsafe sex when a person is intoxicated; or from binge drinking i.e. drinking heavily over a short period of time. In combination with other drugs or medication, there is a high risk of drug interaction, overdose and death.

Negative effects on various body systems and organs

These include the brain, gut, liver, pancreas, heart and circulatory system. It increases blood pressure and stress levels, as well as disturb sleep patterns and sexual function. It is also dehydrating and this is bad for the skin, leading to wrinkles and puffiness in the face.

Over time, there is a risk of developing cancer, hardening of the liver, brain damage and memory loss. A person can suffer from mood swings and become aggressive, depressed or paranoid because of excessive consumption of alcohol.

Alcohol is known to adversely affect the baby's development in the womb if a mother consumes alcohol during pregnancy, leading to physical defects and sometimes mental retardation. It can also cause problems such as bleeding, miscarriage, stillbirth and premature birth.

How much alcohol is too much?

National Dietary Guidelines recommend that alcohol intake should be limited to not more than 2 standard drinks a day. Everyone should have at least 2 alcohol-free days a week. In general, women have a lower threshold for safe drinking levels.



1.1
285ml
Full Strength Beer
4.9% Alc./Vol



1.2
425ml
Mid Strength Beer
3.5% Alc./Vol



0.6
285ml
Light Beer
2.7% Alc./Vol



1.5
375ml
Full Strength Beer
4.9% Alc./Vol



1
375ml
Mid Strength Beer
3.5% Alc./Vol



0.8
375ml
Light Beer
2.7% Alc./Vol



1.5
375ml
Pre-mix Spirits
5% Alc./Vol



1.2
300ml
Pre-mix Spirits
5% Alc./Vol



1
30ml
Spirit Nip
40% Alc./Vol



22
700ml
Bottle of Spirits
40% Alc./Vol



1
30ml
Spirit Shot
40% Alc./Vol



1
60ml
Port/Sherry
Glass
20% Alc./Vol



1.5
170ml
Average Serve of
Sparkling Wine/
Champagne
11.5% Alc./Vol



1.5
150ml
Average Serve
of Wine
12.5% Alc./Vol



7.5
750ml
Bottle
of Wine
12.5% Alc./Vol

One “standard drink” contains 10 mg of alcohol. The size of one standard drink is smaller than what many people realise; it depends on both the alcohol content as well as volume. E.g. an average serve of wine 150 ml (12.5% Alc./vol) is 1.5 and not 1 standard drink. Similarly, full strength beer 375 ml (4.9% Alc./vol) is 1.5 standard drinks.

It takes the body about one full hour to get rid of each standard drink through metabolism in the liver. Fresh air, drinking more water or coffee, even vomiting, will not hasten the process of sobering up.

It is helpful to count your drinks to have an accurate idea of the actual amount consumed over each week. How often you drink, when and where you drink, and why you drink are also important considerations.

How does a person know he or she has a drinking problem?

A person need not drink every day to be drinking too much. Binge drinking over weekends is just as harmful.

If you respond “yes” to two or more of the following questions, you may have a drinking problem:

- Have you ever felt you ought to cut down on your drinking?
- Have people annoyed you by criticising your drinking?
- Have you ever felt bad or guilty about your drinking?
- Have you required a drink in the morning so as to feel better?

Another sign to look out for is its negative effects on your life. Is your work or studies affected e.g. mistakes made at work or in school, lateness or absenteeism because of hangovers? Other negative effects that are seen in problem drinking include damage to family or social life, finances, physical and emotional health as well as trouble with the law e.g. drink-driving.



Some may start to drink more so as to achieve the same effect alcohol had on them at an earlier stage. They may not be able to control their drinking, even when they wish to. For these people, stopping suddenly can lead to withdrawal symptoms, which are unpleasant sensations such as nervousness, shakiness, sweating, nausea and headaches. They may also have craving and urges to drink, which are difficult to resist.

What are the treatments for alcohol problems?

The first step is to admit that you may have a problem. Try to understand what motivates you to change your drinking habits.

A visit to your doctor can be useful for support and advice. Your doctor can also carry out a health assessment for you. Medication is now available to reduce craving and make it easier to cope with withdrawal symptoms when you stop or cut down drinking.

It is helpful to consult a substance abuse counsellor or to attend regular group support meetings at Alcoholics Anonymous (AA).

Some tips on sensible drinking:

- Learn to relax without alcohol.
- Say "No" when pressured to drink.
- Enjoy drink-free days.
- Eat a good meal before drinking.
- Start with a non-alcoholic drink at a party or function.
- If drinking, sip slowly.
- Finish your glass before topping it up to keep track of how much you drink.
- Alternate an alcoholic drink with a non-alcoholic one such as soft drinks, juice or water.
- Do not drink and drive.
- Try to stay with people you trust when drinking.



If you (or a friend) have a problem with alcohol, please contact:

1. Addiction Medicine Clinic, Changi General Hospital
(For treatment of alcohol, benzodiazepine and
gambling addiction only)
2 Simei Street 3
Singapore 529889
Consultation by appointment only. Please call 6850 3333.
2. Community Addictions Management Programme (CAMP),
Institute of Mental Health
10 Buangkok View
Singapore 539747
Consultation by appointment only. Please call 6389 2200.
3. Alcoholics Anonymous
Damien Hall, Blessed Sacrament Church
1 Commonwealth Drive
Singapore 149603
For enquiries, please call 6475 0890 (answering machine).
4. Recovery Support Group Meetings
WE Centre for Addictions Recovery and Education
620 Tiong Bahru Road
Singapore 158789
For enquiries, please call 6471 5346 (answering machine).
Email: admin@wecare.org.sg



For appointments and enquiries,
please call CGH Appointment Centre at
Tel: (65) 6850 3333

CGH Appointment Centre operating hours:

8.30 am to 8.00 pm (Monday to Friday)
8.30am to 12.30 pm (Saturday & Sunday)
Closed on Public Holidays

For more information, please visit
<http://www.cgh.com.sg>



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