

Alcoholism

Alcoholism is a disease

Alcoholism is a chronic, often progressive, disease that's characterised by a physical and psychological dependence on alcohol. It's sometimes also known as alcohol dependence.

Alcohol dependency may result from a genetic predisposition, mental illness, or sustained heavy and abusive drinking.

There's no known cure for alcoholism, though many people can stay sober for the long term with commitment and effort. However, before people with alcoholism can start recovery, they have to admit that they have a drinking problem.

Alcoholism is characterised by a physical and psychological dependence on alcohol

Some people have very serious problems with alcohol without having all the signs and symptoms of alcoholism.

Warning signs

Here are some of the signs that someone might have a drinking problem (it's not a complete list by any means).

- Feeling a compulsion to drink
- Being unable to limit how much they are drinking at any particular time
- Needing to drink greater amounts of alcohol to feel the desired effect
- Experiencing physical withdrawal symptoms (nausea, sweating, shallow breathing and shaking) if they don't drink alcohol
- Needing to drink to feel good or normal
- Losing interest in activities, hobbies or relationships
- Experiencing blackouts – forgetting what happened when they were drunk
- Drinking alone or hiding their drinking from others



take action

If you do experience any of these signs or symptoms – or know someone else who does – please contact a doctor, healthcare professional or alcohol treatment organisation for help.

talkingalcohol.com

is a site dedicated to helping people make informed choices about alcohol

other websites

These sites contain further information that you may find useful. However, SABMiller is not responsible for the content of these sites.

- Adult Children of Alcoholics World Service Organization, Inc.
www.adultchildren.org
- Alcohol Concern UK Services Directory
www.alcoholconcern.org.uk/servlets/wrapper/services_directory.jsp

- Alcoholics Anonymous Worldwide
www.alcoholics-anonymous.org
- U.K. Department of Health, Alcohol Misuse Useful Links
www.dh.gov.uk/en/PublicHealth/Healthimprovement/Alcoholmisuse/
- U.S. SAMSHA Substance Abuse Treatment Facility Locator
<http://dasis3.samhsa.gov/>



Alcohol poisoning

Someone with alcohol poisoning needs urgent medical attention

Alcohol poisoning is the result of drinking dangerous amounts of alcohol. It can be deadly; those who survive can be left with irreversible brain damage.

When someone consumes excessive amounts of alcohol, breathing slows and the brain is deprived of oxygen. The struggle to deal with an overdose of alcohol and lack of oxygen will eventually cause the brain to shut down the body functions that regulate breathing and heart rate. When that happens, the drinker can die.

Rapid, excessive drinking is especially dangerous because people can consume a fatal amount of alcohol before they lose consciousness. It's best to always drink in moderation and to avoid taking part in drinking games that involve drinking excessive amounts or drinking rapidly.

Underage and inexperienced drinkers are particularly vulnerable to alcohol poisoning.

Alcohol poisoning is most commonly associated with drinking excessive amounts of alcohol in a short period of time.

Warning signs

Signs that someone might have alcohol poisoning include:

- Mental confusion
- Stupor, unconsciousness, coma
- Vomiting
- Seizures
- Slow or irregular breathing (with gaps between breaths of more than eight seconds)
- Blue-tinged skin, pale skin and/or cold clammy skin
- Low body temperature
- A strong smell of alcohol

People can be suffering from alcohol poisoning without having all these signs and symptoms. If you suspect that someone has alcohol poisoning, get emergency medical help immediately.

People should never be left to 'sleep it off' – this could be a fatal mistake. A person's blood alcohol concentration may continue to rise even after they have passed out.



take action

A person with alcohol poisoning needs urgent medical attention. Here's what you should do:

- Don't panic
- Get medical help immediately – call the emergency services
- Turn them on their side (to prevent them inhaling or choking on vomit)
- Keep them warm
- Stay with them until medical help arrives

Don't try and sober the person up with black coffee or cold showers – these things don't work – and don't leave them to 'sleep it off'. They may never wake up.

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other websites

These sites contain further information that you may find useful. However, SABMiller is not responsible for the content of these sites.

- Mayo Clinic – signs and symptoms of alcohol poisoning
www.mayoclinic.com/health/alcohol-poisoning/

Binge drinking

Rapid or prolonged drinking is irresponsible and dangerous

Whether labelled 'binge drinking' or 'alcohol abuse', any pattern of drinking that involves rapid intoxication or intoxication for an extended period of time carries the potential for considerable social, psychological and physical harm, and should be avoided.

Binge drinking carries the potential for considerable social, psychological and physical harm

There is no universal scientific or medical definition of what constitutes binge drinking. The important thing is what can be done to prevent it.

Rapid or prolonged drinking can be dangerous. It can cause or contribute to:

- Alcohol poisoning
- Accidents, including car accidents
- Brain or neurological damage
- Risky behaviour (such as unprotected sex)
- Alcohol dependence
- Stroke or cardiovascular problems
- Poor academic performance.



Rapid or prolonged drinking can happen at any stage of your life; it's not just a problem for underage drinkers.

No matter how old you are, it's irresponsible and dangerous. You shouldn't do it.

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- Alcohol Concern – Factsheet 20: Binge Drinking
www.alcoholconcern.org.uk
- Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, UK – Binge Drinking and Public Health
www.parliament.uk/documents/

- NSW Office of Drug & Alcohol Policy, Australia – Binge Drinking
www.alcoholinfo.nsw.gov.au/preventing_abuse_and_harm/binge_drinking
- US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – Quick Stats: Binge Drinking
www.cdc.gov/alcohol/quickstats/binge_drinking.htm



Cancer

Alcohol may contribute to some types of cancer

Some studies have reported that alcohol can contribute to the development of certain types of cancer. For example, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) concluded that cancers in the oral cavity, pharynx, larynx, oesophagus, colon, breast and liver are causally related to alcohol consumption, with 50 grams of alcohol or more per day being associated with an increased risk of these diseases.

Alcohol may also be linked to other forms of cancer, including lung, stomach, pancreatic and endometrial cancer.

On the other hand, some studies have suggested that moderate alcohol consumption can be associated with a lower risk of bladder, kidney, ovarian and prostate cancer. Still, we do not encourage people to drink alcohol beverages for any health benefits they might provide.



take action

Everyone's health circumstances are different. You should talk to your doctor if you have any questions about the health risks and benefits of alcohol consumption.

You shouldn't drink alcohol for its health benefits – for good health, you should look to diet, exercise and other lifestyle factors.

Many factors affect our risk of developing cancer, including genetics, diet, lifestyle and the environment.

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other websites

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- Cancer Research UK – Alcohol and cancer: the evidence
<http://info.cancerresearchuk.org/healthyliving/alcohol/howdoweknow/>

- National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism: Alcohol and Cancer
<http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/>
- The Cancer Council, NSW, Australia – Alcohol and cancer
www.cancercouncil.com.au
- International Agency for Research on Cancer
www.iarc.fr

Diabetes

Diabetics should be careful with alcohol

People with diabetes must be extremely careful with alcohol.

The American Diabetes Association suggests that light-to-moderate alcohol consumption (not more than two drinks per day for men and not more than one drink per day for women) is acceptable for some diabetics – providing their doctor agrees.

Some diabetics should not drink at all because alcohol can make their condition worse. For example, diabetics with high levels of triglycerides (a certain type of fat in the blood) shouldn't drink alcohol because it affects the liver's ability to clear fat from the bloodstream.

Alcohol affects the liver's ability to clear fat from the bloodstream

Alcohol and the onset of diabetes

Some studies have reported that light-to-moderate alcohol consumption can have a mild protective effect against the development of type 2 diabetes. On the other hand, other studies suggest that, for some people with type 2 diabetes, even moderate alcohol intake may induce low blood sugar levels.

Pancreatitis

Pancreatitis is a health condition that's connected with diabetes. Prolonged, heavy alcohol use can contribute to pancreatitis which, in turn, can lead to diabetes.



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If you are a diabetic, you should talk to your doctor to decide what – if any – level of alcohol consumption is safe for you.

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- Canadian Diabetes Association, Alcohol + Diabetes
www.diabetes.ca/Section_Professionals/ng_alcohol.asp
- International Diabetes Institute
www.diabetes.com.au

- WebMD Medical Reference, Diabetes: Drinking Alcohol
<http://diabetes.webmd.com/drinking-alcohol>
- American Diabetes Association
www.diabetes.org/type-1-diabetes/alcohol.jsp



Hangover

If you drink too much, you'll have a hangover. But what's going on in your body?

Alcohol is absorbed through the stomach, irritating the cell lining. It also promotes the production of hydrochloric acid in the stomach. Vomiting is one way that your body gets rid of the toxins.

Common symptoms of a hangover are dehydration, headache, fatigue, nausea and an upset stomach

Alcohol inhibits the production of anti-diuretic hormone, a hormone that keeps the urine concentrated. As a result, your kidneys expel water in your urine instead of reabsorbing it into the body. You will urinate more, and your body will become dehydrated. To compensate, the body's organs try to absorb water. Your brain shrinks, which leads to headaches.

Excess urination also removes necessary salts and potassium from the body. This can result in fatigue and nausea.

Glycogen is the body's main source of stored energy. Alcohol breaks down glycogen in the liver, and expels it from the body in the urine. Lack of glycogen can make you feel tired and weak.

When the liver breaks down alcohol, it produces a toxic substance, acetaldehyde. This has to be broken down by something called glutathione. When there is too much alcohol in the body, the liver's store of glutathione runs out, leaving the toxic acetaldehyde to build up in the body and leaves you with a headache and feeling nauseous

Glutamine is a naturally occurring stimulant in the body. Alcohol inhibits its production. But when you stop drinking, the body reacts by overproducing glutamine. The glutamine stimulates the brain, making it hard for you to sleep and contributing to feelings of anxiety.

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Heart and cardiovascular

Moderate alcohol consumption can benefit the heart and cardiovascular system

For some people, particularly middle-aged and older men and post-menopausal women, moderate alcohol consumption provides some protection against heart attack, coronary vascular disease, stroke and death from cardiovascular causes.

For some people, moderate alcohol consumption provides some protection against heart attack

This may be because it appears to help to elevate high-density lipoproteins (also known as 'HDL' or 'good cholesterol') in the blood and has other positive effects on the blood and blood vessels.

Prolonged heavy drinking, however, has been associated with haemorrhagic stroke, congestive heart failure and atrial fibrillation.



take action

Everyone's health circumstances are different. If you want to find out more about the risks and benefits of moderate alcohol consumption and how they affect you, you should talk to your doctor or another healthcare professional.

You shouldn't drink alcohol for its health benefits – for good health, you should look to diet, exercise and other lifestyle factors.

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- Harvard School of Public Health
www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/
- NIAAA Alcohol Alert, Alcohol and Coronary Heart Disease
<http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/>

- World Health Organization
www.who.int/substance_abuse/publications/



Liver

Excessive alcohol consumption can damage the liver

The liver breaks down alcohol so that it can be eliminated from the body.

Prolonged, heavy alcohol consumption can damage the liver and this will prevent it from functioning properly.

Liver diseases associated with alcohol include fatty liver (also known as steatosis), alcohol hepatitis and liver cirrhosis. While some of the symptoms can be minimal, the consequences of some liver diseases can be very serious, including severe jaundice, blood clotting problems and, possibly, death.

Liver disease that's associated with alcohol consumption is normally seen in alcoholics or those who've had a prolonged history of alcohol abuse.

What is cirrhosis?

Cirrhosis is perhaps the most well-known of the liver diseases associated with alcohol abuse.

It's a condition where scar tissue replaces normal liver tissue – the word 'cirrhosis' means scarring. As the scarring progresses, it alters the liver's normal structure and interferes with the way it functions.

Cirrhosis of the liver can have very serious health consequences, including death.

The consequences of some liver diseases can be very serious



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If you have an existing liver disease, such as hepatitis, or you're at risk for other reasons (obesity is a risk factor for liver disease), you should talk to your doctor to see if it's safe for you to drink alcohol at all.

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other websites

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- American Liver Foundation
www.liverfoundation.org/education/info/alcohol/
- British Liver Trust
www.britishlivertrust.org.uk/home/the-liver/liver-diseases/

- National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism
<http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/>
- Patient UK
www.patient.co.uk



Medication and drug interaction

Mixing alcohol and medications can be dangerous

Mixing alcohol and drugs can be dangerous – whether you're taking prescribed medication or an over-the-counter remedy. Older people need to be particularly careful, as they are more likely to take medications and have an overall weakened health status.

There are many medications that should never be mixed with alcohol. Others should be taken with caution.

There are many medications that should never be mixed with alcohol

What can happen?

- The effects of the medication can become dangerously strong
Alcohol can increase the effects of hypnotics, sleeping pills and sedatives. This can lead to increased drowsiness, coma and even death.
- The side effects of the medication can get worse
For example, mixing alcohol with aspirin increases the risk of getting stomach ulcers
- The medication can become less effective
For example, mixing alcohol with diabetes medication can prevent it from working properly and may contribute to dangerous instability in blood sugar levels. Alcohol can also interfere with the efficacy of antiretroviral drugs used to treat HIV/AIDS.



take action

Always read the labels and leaflets that come with your medication. Some medications should never be mixed with alcohol; others must be taken with caution. You should check with your doctor or pharmacist to see whether it's okay to drink alcohol while you're taking the medication.

Don't take anything for granted. Remember that people react differently to medication, to alcohol and combinations of the two.

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other websites

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- Drugs.com Interaction Database
www.drugs.com/drug_interactions.html
- Harmful Interactions: Mixing Alcohol With Medicines (NIAAA)
<http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/Medicine/medicine.htm>



Pregnancy

Alcohol should be avoided during pregnancy – even in small quantities

Pregnant women should either not drink alcohol, or seek medical advice before they do, as there is currently no consensus on how much alcohol is safe for a pregnant woman to consume before causing risk to a foetus.

When a woman drinks alcohol during pregnancy, it is carried through her bloodstream, through the placenta and into the foetal blood.

This can affect the development of the foetus and cause Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). FASD refers to a broad range of birth defects, including Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS).

There is currently no consensus on how much alcohol is safe for a pregnant woman to consume

People with FAS may have facial abnormalities, growth retardation and/or brain damage.

Other birth defects associated with drinking during pregnancy include heart and kidney defects, hearing and sight impairment, cleft lip, impaired brain development and central nervous system dysfunction.

Some studies have suggested that low levels of drinking during pregnancy may have no adverse effect on the foetus. However, medical science has not established what a safe level of alcohol consumption during pregnancy might be. Drinking alcohol at any stage during pregnancy can affect the brain development of the foetus.

Some studies have found that heavy drinking may be associated with infertility, particularly in women over the age of 30.

Heavy drinking by the father may also contribute to problems in their offspring, including cardiovascular defects, low birth weight and immune system problems.



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Talk to your doctor or health care professional before drinking during pregnancy.

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- National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome
www.nofas.org
- NIAAA, Drinking and Your Pregnancy
http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/DrinkingPregnancy_HTML/pregnancy.htm

- The Center For Adoption Medicine, FASD Links
www.adoptmed.org/topics/fetal-alcohol-spectrum-links.html
- U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC), Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders
www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/fas/



Stroke

Alcohol consumption can either increase or decrease your risk of having a stroke

Stroke is what happens when the blood supply to the brain is interrupted. This kills cells in the brain, which can result in permanent disability (both physical and mental functioning) and even death.

The relationship between alcohol consumption and strokes is complex. Heavy consumption is associated with an increased risk for stroke, while there is a possible decreased risk associated with light-to-moderate consumption.

The relationship between alcohol consumption and stroke is complex

Increased risk

Heavy or excessive alcohol consumption can raise your blood pressure. Research suggests that this can increase the risk for stroke.

Reduced risk

Some research has suggested that light-to-moderate alcohol consumption may have a protective effect against stroke by increasing the levels of high-density lipoprotein cholesterol (also known as 'HDL' or 'good cholesterol') and anti-clotting properties in the blood.



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If you have any questions about how drinking might affect your risk of stroke, contact your doctor.

However, you shouldn't drink alcohol for its health benefits – for good health, you should look to diet, exercise and other lifestyle factors.

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- The Stroke Association (UK)
www.stroke.org.uk/information/
- American Stroke Association (US)
www.americanheart.org

- National Stroke Association – Fact Sheet (US)
www.stroke.org/site/DocServer/STROKE_101_Fact_Sheet.pdf?docID=4541
- National Stroke Foundation Foundation – Risk Factors (Australia)
- The Heart and Stroke Foundation (South Africa)
www.heartfoundation.co.za
- Heart and Stroke Foundation (Canada)
<http://www1.heartandstroke.ca/>

