



Frequently Asked Questions About Alcohol

How can I have a drinking problem if I can hold my liquor?

Anyone who drinks too much liquor in too short an amount of time gets drunk. Some people can drink more than others because of genetic factors or because they've built up their tolerance, just like any other drug user. Being able to "hold your liquor" actually is a sign that you may have a drinking problem.

I'm no different when I drink than when I'm sober. Is it possible that alcohol doesn't affect me?

Most moderate drinkers report that low doses of alcohol help them to communicate, stimulates their appetite and relaxes them. Even a regular, small dose of alcohol, however, can lead to sadness and anxiety, hyperactivity and irritability, and a range of interpersonal problems. At higher, chronic doses almost any emotional symptom can result, from paranoia to "hearing things" to insomnia.

Do people with alcoholism have "addictive personalities"?

There is no such thing as an "addictive personality". No one kind of personality predicts alcoholism. The presence of alcoholism does not predict any particular personality trait. However, the reverse is true. Some personality disorders do have a greater frequency of alcohol problems. Antisocial behavior in childhood, for example, often leads to drinking and eventual alcoholism. Some surveys have shown that 50 percent to 90 percent of prison inmates have alcoholism, and many of them display antisocial personalities.

I like to drink. You could even say I'm a heavy drinker. Does that mean I have alcoholism?

A "problem" or "heavy" drinker does not necessarily have alcoholism. Alcoholism is not defined simply by the quantity of alcohol consumed. There is no single, correct definition of alcoholism because the disease is so subtle in its progression. The point where heavy drinking becomes alcoholism often is unclear.

But applying an overall definition of addiction—compulsive use and continued abuse in spite of adverse consequences—is a good place to begin. Alcoholism is considered an addiction because it

contains these elements, which are seen in addiction to all drugs:

- preoccupation with obtaining the substance
- compulsive use
- narrowing of other interests
- denial of use patterns and relapse

Many people who are moderate drinkers show early signs of alcoholism, such as hangovers that cause absenteeism from work, interpersonal problems and medical concerns. Any person who uses alcohol and has trouble functioning needs immediate, professional help.

Does alcohol stimulate appetite?

There is some basis for the custom of the before dinner drink. Studies show that an alcoholic beverage taken 30 minutes before lunch increases food intake relative to a non-alcoholic beverage, despite the higher energy (calories) of the alcoholic beverage. Total energy intake was enhanced by 30 percent, suggesting that alcohol does stimulate food intake.

Does alcohol cause weight gain?

There is uncertainty as to whether regular alcohol consumption contributes directly to weight gain and risk of obesity. Alcohol is a dietary macronutrient, contributing significantly to energy intake. Macronutrients differ in their capacity to produce satiation (a full feeling), with protein being the most satiating. In a prospective study of 7,608 men aged 40-59 years of age, researchers found that heavy alcohol intake (> 30 g/day) contributes directly to weight gain and obesity, regardless of the type of alcohol consumed. There have been studies that show that there appears to be a link between obesity, smoking and total alcohol consumption. It is unclear if this is related to an overall caloric load or some other factor producing all three effects. A recent study did show that alcohol modulates hormonal activity in fat tissue. The hormones involved, called adipokines, regulate food intake, glucose and lipid metabolism and sexual development. The exact role of alcohol in causing weight gain is under further investigation.

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