



Why Should we Consider Abstaining from Alcohol?

Substance Misuse Prevention Newsletter: A Collection of Readings

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Consequences of Use

Mind:

Judgement - Drinking impairs judgement which can lead to consequences such as car accidents, falls, physical altercations and other high-risk choices that would often not occur while sober. Those between the ages of 21-24 have the highest rates of alcohol or drug related car crashes (SEOW, 2019).

Neurotransmitters - Alcohol is thought to suppress excitatory neurotransmission (e.g. Glutamate, Aspartate) and or enhance inhibitory neurotransmission (e.g. GABA) (Valenzuela, 1997). Alcohol also increases the presence of Serotonin, which is a neurotransmitter that helps to regulate mood. In general Alcohol can inhibit the ability of these neurotransmitters to communicate at their normal speed, which can lead to an imbalance in both mood and behaviors. This disruption in the brain may result in depression, agitation, memory impairment and more (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, [NIAAA], n.d.).

Body:

Biophysical Implications - Alcohol use increases one's risk of developing hypertension, cancer, pancreatitis, cirrhosis of liver, a weakened immune system and can also lead to weight gain (NIH, n.d.).

University Health and Counseling Services

Prevalence of Use Amongst Young Adults

According to the Maine State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup [SEOW] (2016), it is estimated that around two out of five young adults in Maine would have drunk in the past month. Moreover, Maine has a higher rate of binge drinking when compared to rates in both the U.S. and Northeast (SEOW, 2016). Overall, around 28% of college students report binge drinking within a previous two-week timeframe (National Institute of Health [NIH], 2020). Most concerning, young adults in Maine perceive binge drinking as less harmful than other young adults in the U.S. and Northeast (SEOW, 2016). Young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 living in Maine have the highest rate of risky alcohol use and are consequently most likely to develop an alcohol use disorder (SEOW, 2019). Contributing factors vary but having easy access to alcohol often plays a role in patterns of use (SEOW, 2019).

Link to the 2016 CDC SEOW Use Among Young Adults Fact Sheet:

https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/samhs/osa/data/cesn/facts/18-25_year_olds_FactSheet_2016_3.30.2016.pdf

What is Binge Drinking?

According to the NIH (2020), binge drinking is defined as woman who consumes four or more drinks or a male who consumes five or more drinks in about 2 hours. Or any gender who consumes any amount of alcohol that results in a blood alcohol content of 0.8 grams of alcohol per deciliter or higher. This will vary depending on someone's weight, if they have eaten before drinking, are drinking water and how fast they consume the alcohol.

Link to NIH Article: <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures-and-fact-sheets/binge-drinking>

Links to an article & video about alcohol & how it impacts the brain:

<https://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/arh21-2/144.pdf>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1D2uyrNcGuo>

Try out the "Dry" Life

We have all heard of "Dry January", which is when people start the new year by abstaining from alcohol. Although, experimenting with sobriety does not have to be limited to the month of January. Abstaining from alcohol for 30 days at any point in time may lead to a longer period of sobriety because of the positive health benefits that can ensue. Furthermore, abstinence may make someone feel like they are able to be more in control of their health.

Check out this article about the benefits of 30 days without alcohol:

<https://www.healthline.com/health-news/what-happens-to-your-body-when-you-quit-alcohol-for-30-days#Benefits-of-Dry-January>

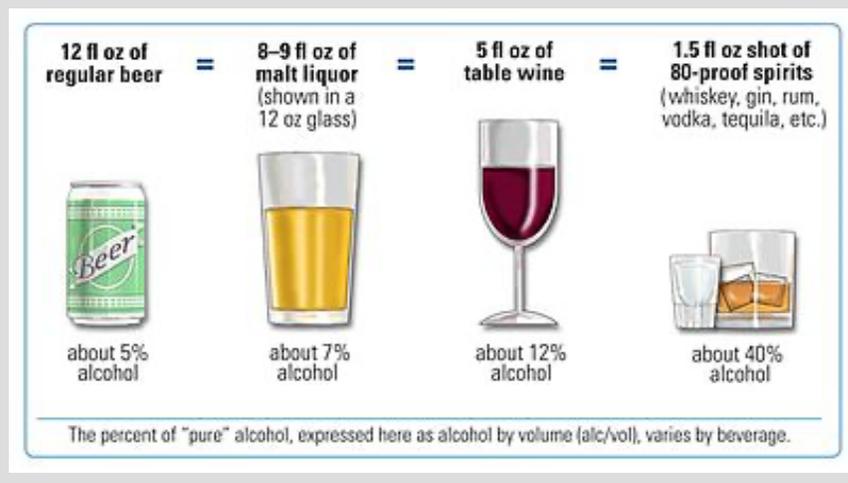
How to Reduce the Risk of Adverse Alcohol related Outcomes:

- Count & measure drinks
- Eat & stay hydrated before & during alcohol consumption
- Pace yourself: The body can only metabolize one drink per hour
- Do not mix alcohol with other over the counter or prescription drugs
- Never leave a drink unattended
- Abstain from drinking as much as you can
- Understand what a standard drink is
- Avoid drinking games
- Have a safe transportation plan

"The only person you are destined to become is the person you decide to be"
- Ralph Waldo Emerson

What is a Standard Drink?

Understanding what is considered to be a standard drink can help you monitor and reduce risky drinking patterns.



Benefits of Not Drinking

Better Skin: Alcohol can cause dehydration, inflammation, reduce collagen and cause broken capillaries (Verywellmind, 2020).

Better Sleep: Alcohol hinders our ability to get restful sleep as it interrupts the sleep wake cycles (Verywellmind, 2020). Disordered sleep can disrupt an individual's overall health and ability to function at school and work.

Weight Loss: Alcohol is filled with sugar and calories, which can lead to weight gain (Verywellmind, 2020). Weight gain can contribute to the development of high cholesterol, hypertension, diabetes and more.

Improved Mental Health & Memory: Using alcohol to cope is not only unhealthy but can also exacerbate underlying mental illness. Eliminating alcohol can improve mental health and prevent alterations in neurons and structural changes in the brain (NIAAA, n.d.). Alcohol use can cause the hippocampus to decrease in size, which may impair memory and learning. Quitting alcohol may help to reverse these harmful changes and help to reestablish homeostasis within the brain.

Less Chance of Illness: Alcohol negatively impacts the immune system, which can lead to more bouts of illness. Abstaining can strengthen the immune system and decrease one's risk of illness (Verywellmind, 2020).

For comments on this newsletter or suggestions for future articles please contact: Diane Geyer, LCPC, LADC, CCS, NCC~ Clinician and Coordinator of Clinical Substance Use Services at USM or Jillian Littlefield, RN and Graduate Assistant ~ Email: diane.geyer@maine.edu, jillian.littlefield@maine.edu