April is Alcohol Awareness Month and lately it seems as though more information is being published on the health effects of Alcohol.

It is not uncommon for people to associate the use of alcohol with relaxation, or as a means to calm down. Many students use alcohol to sleep or reduce stress. The belief is that alcohol will reduce tension, however alcohol can lower a person’s stress response, their ability to cope with troublesome thoughts and everyday pressures. To learn more: **Drinking to Calm Your Nerves Just Might Make your Anxiety Worse**

**Prolonged alcohol misuse has been associated with structural and functional changes in the brain.**

A severe Alcohol Use Disorder can lead to generalized atrophic changes in the brain.

- Also, certain regions of the brain, such as frontal lobe systems, are more vulnerable to the adverse effects of alcohol as compared to other regions.

  The frontal lobe is the part of the brain that controls important cognitive functions such as problem solving, memory, language, expression of emotions and sexual desire.

All these changes in the brain can contribute to the emergence of a comorbid psychiatric condition, otherwise known as a co-occurring condition.

- It has been proposed that common neurobiological pathways may be involved in alcohol use disorders and various psychiatric disorders.

- Moreover, the psychosocial stresses that go hand in hand with a life-impacting alcohol use disorder can exacerbate a susceptibility to mental illness.

**The presence of a psychiatric disorder can also increase one's propensity to misuse substances.**

Individuals with psychiatric disorders may try to self-medicate with substances (including alcohol) to achieve:

- Relief from the psychiatric symptoms of the illness.

- Reduction in the adverse effects associated with medicines used to treat these disorders.

To learn more: **The Effects of Alcohol Addiction on the Brain**
It’s important to remember the frontal lobe region of the brain is under-developed for young adults. The brain is still growing and changing until around the age of 26 and substance use in college can impact the brain as it is changing and maturing. A physician at Mass General Hospital reported, “50 – 60% of college students have a psychiatric disorder.” This statistic included, substance misuse and substance use disorder(s), anxiety, depression, learning disabilities and attention issues. To review this article: Mental Health of College Students and What You Should Know About Brain Development

It is estimated that 17.6 million Americans suffer from an Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD). Individuals with an AUD are more likely than the general population to have coexisting psychiatric disorders. Mood and Anxiety disorders are the most common to co-occur with AUD. Psychiatric Times addresses this in an article: Alcohol Use Disorders and Psychiatric Comorbidity: Pharmacological Management

New research recently revealed there are no healthy levels of drinking. "Although it has previously been suggested moderate alcohol intake may reduce risk of stroke or heart disease, this new study adds to recent evidence that finds no protective effect even at low levels of intake," he added. "Sadly, the hope that alcohol somehow protects against cardiovascular disease is probably unfounded." To read about this new research: Even One Alcoholic Drink a Day Can Raise Risk of Stroke, study says...

For More articles on the Health effects of Alcohol:

Alcohol promotes disease by altering oral bacteria

Alcohol Use Disorder: Brain damage may progress despite sobriety

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