

Alcohol

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Alcohol is one of the most widely used drugs in the world.

One drink contains 12 grams (.5 ounce) of pure alcohol. Examples of standard drinks include:

- 12 ounces of beer or wine cooler
- 5 ounces of wine
- 1.5 ounces of distilled spirits such as vodka, gin or scotch.

Alcohol is absorbed quickly into your bloodstream. How fast it is absorbed will depend on the type and amount of food in your stomach. Foods high in fat and carbohydrates will slow how fast alcohol is absorbed.

Effects of Alcohol Use

Alcohol can cause the following:

- hangover
- bad breath
- impaired judgment and behavior
- altered perceptions and emotions
- distorted hearing and coordination
- blurred or distorted vision
- upset stomach (nausea)
- sweating
- shakiness
- anxiety.

Effects of Alcohol Use on Your Body

Alcohol-related issues can have long-term effects.

- Too much alcohol can affect your:
 - brain
 - heart
 - liver
 - pancreas
 - immune system.
- Alcohol can increase your risk for cancer.
- Alcohol can affect your behavior and cause:
 - family problems
 - legal problems
 - poor attendance or performance at work or school
 - accidents
 - injuries.

Signs That You May Have an Alcohol Use Disorder

Alcohol use disorder can be a primary disorder or it can be secondary to a mental health disorder. A secondary disorder means that alcohol can be a way of coping with post-traumatic stress, anxiety or another mental health condition.

(over)

You may have an alcohol use disorder if you have 2 or more of the following:

- You often take in larger amounts of alcohol or drink over a longer period than you intended.
- You want to cut down or control alcohol use but are unsuccessful in your efforts.
- You spend a great deal of time in activities to get alcohol, use alcohol or recover from its effects.
- You think about alcohol most of the time or have a strong urge to drink.
- You are not able to fulfill your roles at work, school or home on a regular basis.
- You continue alcohol use even though it is causing problems in your relationships.
- You change or cancel social, recreational or work-related activities because of alcohol use.
- You use alcohol in situations in which it is physically dangerous.
- You continue alcohol use even though you know it is causing harm to your body, mind or both.
- You have to drink more than you used to in order to feel the effects of alcohol (increase in tolerance).
- You drink to prevent withdrawal symptoms that develop when you do not drink (tremors, nausea, sweating or mood swings).

Treatment

There are many options for treating an alcohol use disorder:

- your health care provider (for counseling, treatment, referral or other local resources)
- allinahealth.org/mentalhealth
- Center for Substance Abuse Treatment: samhsa.gov or 1-800-662-4357 (to learn about local treatment programs or to talk with someone about drinking problems)
- Alcoholics Anonymous, support group: aa.org or your local phone book (to find a chapter close to you)
- National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism:
 - Go to niaaa.nih.gov.
 - Click on the *Publications & Multimedia* tab.
 - Click on *Brochures & Fact Sheets*.

**Information adapted from the
National Institute on Alcohol Abuse
and Alcoholism and the U.S. Department
of Health and Human Services**