



The risks of alcohol use and how to find support

Most United States adults ages 21 and older report they drink alcohol.¹ For many, drinking alcohol is a part of their social life. They may meet friends for a beer after work, enjoy a date-night cocktail or sip a glass of wine with dinner and friends.

But for some people, drinking alcohol shifts from occasional to excessive use and sometimes leads to an alcohol use disorder (AUD).

No amount of alcohol is risk-free.² Alcohol use impairs judgment and coordination, increasing the risk of injuries, violence and sexually transmitted infections. It's also a toxin that can lead to alcohol poisoning, pregnancy complications, cancer and chronic diseases, like high blood pressure, heart disease, liver disease and stroke.

The more a person drinks, the greater the potential harm to their overall health and well-being.

What is excessive drinking?

Excessive drinking (also referred to as “heavy” or “risky” drinking) is generally considered to be:

- For males, 15 or more drinks per week
- For females, 8 or more drinks per week



Alcohol is one of the leading preventable causes of death in the U.S.³



Each year, more than

178,000

Americans die from causes related to excessive alcohol use.³

What is alcohol use disorder?

AUD is a treatable medical condition. It's when a person can't control how much they drink, including when their drinking is harming their health and well-being. It's not clear why some people develop AUD and others don't. A combination of biological, social and psychological factors may contribute. The condition can be mild, moderate or severe.

Getting high-quality treatment and support can make all the difference. The journey starts by making the decision to try to get better, then finding treatment and building a support system.

Signs someone may need help

- They hide their alcohol use from others.
- Their friends and coworkers are concerned with their use.
- They find excuses to drink alcohol.
- They drink alcohol to change how they feel, such as to "feel better."
- Their use has increased over time.
- They make promises to stop or cut back, but don't follow through.
- They have had a "blackout" (memory lapse) after using alcohol.
- They feel regret or shame after using it, or after an activity they did while using it.
- They spend money they can't afford on alcohol.
- Their behavior and use put them at risk financially, physically or in other ways.

If 3 or more of these statements seem to be true of someone you care about, they may be using alcohol excessively or be at risk for AUD. Reaching out to a health care professional or support resource can provide clarity and support.



24/7 confidential support is available⁴

Call the Optum Substance Use Helpline at **1-855-780-5955**



Ready to talk to someone?

Get anonymous support 24/7 from an advocate who is trained in substance use care and recovery. They can help you find treatment, typically within 24 hours.

If you're experiencing thoughts of suicide or something else that is urgent or an emergency, call 911 or the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: **988**.

1. Pew Research Center. 10 facts about Americans and alcohol as 'Dry January' begins. Jan. 3, 2024.
2. World Health Organization. No level of alcohol consumption is safe for our health. Dec. 28, 2022.
3. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Alcohol-related emergencies and deaths in the United States. Nov. 2024.
4. Confidential in accordance with the law. Provided at no extra cost as part of your health plan. For you and your covered family members.

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