

Let's talk about...

# Problems with Alcohol

MENTAL ILLNESS DEMYSTIFIED

**MOST CANADIANS CONSUME ALCOHOL – AND THE VAST MAJORITY DOES SO WITHOUT EXPERIENCING NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES. BUT FOR TEN PERCENT OF THE POPULATION, DRINKING ALCOHOL BECOMES A PROBLEM, AND FOR ANOTHER TEN PERCENT AN ADDICTION TO ALCOHOL TAKES OVER THEIR LIVES. OVER THE CENTURIES, MANY WELL-KNOWN PERSONALITIES HAVE BECOME ADDICTED TO ALCOHOL AND BEEN ABLE TO SUCCESSFULLY OVERCOME THEIR ADDICTION. A FEW FAMOUS NAMES INCLUDE: EDGAR ALLEN POE, JACK LONDON, SIR ANTHONY HOPKINS, BETTY FORD, AND STEPHEN KING.**

For many of us, a single drink of alcohol releases tension and reduces inhibitions, making us feel more at ease and outgoing. Some of us feel happy or excited when we drink, while others become depressed or hostile. However, alcohol is a drug and heavy or prolonged consumption has the potential for causing health problems, financial difficulties, job loss, family breakdown, and criminal involvement.

Drinking alcohol quickly affects our body and our brain. Early signs of alcohol intoxication include flushed skin, impaired judgment, and reduced inhibition. Continued drinking increases these effects, and causes other problems such as impaired attention, reduced muscle control, slowed reflexes, staggering walk, slurred speech and double or blurred vision.

A severely intoxicated person may 'black out' for hours or days and have no memory of what was said or done while drinking. Effects of extreme intoxication include inability to stand, vomiting, stupor, coma, and death.

## PROBLEM DRINKING

There are several warning signs that someone's drinking is getting out of control. Consider cutting down and seeking professional help if you find that you are:

- using alcohol to deal with stress and crises
- organizing your life around the availability of alcohol
- developing obsessive attitudes towards alcohol
- suffering from frequent hangovers
- having family conflicts after drinking
- spending too much money on drinking and it is causing financial difficulties

- forgetting what happened during drinking sessions
- having feelings of anger, denial, or guilt when others comment on alcohol intake or behaviour

If your drinking is becoming a problem, then *now* is the time to do something

## BINGE DRINKING

It's called getting tanked, sloshed, blotto, chugging, or funneling – but whatever you call it, it can be very dangerous. Binge drinking is typically defined as consuming five or more drinks for a man and four or more drinks for a woman on a single occasion. That's enough to impair judgment, impede coordination, remove inhibitions, cause slurring of words—and potentially put someone at risk of serious health or social consequences, lasting brain damage and even death.

For some people, especially youth between 15 and 25, the primary focus of a social gathering is to get drunk. They view binge drinking as a social norm and argue that experiencing the consequences of excessive alcohol consumption is part of a 'rite of passage.' If this is you, or someone you know, then be aware that if a large enough quantity is consumed in a short amount of time, the brain's ability to control breathing and heart rate may be harmed – and death may occur.

## ALCOHOLISM

A drinking habit that has developed into an addiction is known as alcoholism. As people develop tolerance, they need more and more alcohol to produce the desired effect. People who are physically dependent on alcohol can develop withdrawal symptoms, such as sleeplessness, tremors, nausea, and seizures, within a few hours after their last drink. These symptoms can last from two to seven days and range from mild to severe, depending on the amount of alcohol consumed and the period of time over which it was used.

Some of the warning signs of alcoholism include:

- the need to drink before facing certain situations
- frequent drinking binges
- a steady increase in drinking
- drinking alone
- early morning drinking

Alcoholism can tear apart families and destroy careers. On average, the life span of a heavy drinker is shortened 10 to 12 years. It is an illness that gets progressively worse, and is potentially fatal. If you or someone you know is a problem or binge drinker, or dealing with alcoholism, treatment is extremely effective. Call your EFAP or contact a local Drug and Alcohol Agency to get help.



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