

ALCOHOL ABUSE RESOURCE PACKET

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UNDERSTANDING ALCOHOL'S EFFECTS

If you understand how alcohol can affect people, it can help you to drink responsibly or choose not to drink at all. The following factors influence how people respond to alcohol, according to the National Institutes of Health and the American Medical Association.

Your weight. The extent of alcohol's effect on the central nervous system depends upon how much is in your blood and how much blood you have. This is because alcohol is distributed through the body via the water in your bloodstream, according to the National Institute on Alcohol and Alcohol Abuse (NIAAA). The more water in your blood, the more diluted the alcohol will be. Generally, the lower your body weight, the less blood and water you have. So, smaller people usually have a higher ratio of alcohol in their blood if they drink the same amount a heavier person drinks.

For most people, intoxication occurs after two to three drinks. An average drink is 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine or 1.5 ounces of 80-proof liquor. Keep in mind that the alcohol content of different types of beer, wine and distilled spirits can vary substantially.

Your gender. Men generally can drink more alcohol than women of the same size before they show its effects. This is because women have less body water than men of similar body weight, so women tend to have a higher blood alcohol level than men of the same weight after drinking the same amount of alcohol. A woman's brain and other organs are exposed to more alcohol and more of its toxic byproducts.

Your age. As people get older, they usually have a higher fat-to-muscle ratio, so they become less able to maintain tolerable amounts of alcohol in the blood as younger people of the same weight.

What's in the drink. The water in beer or wine provides an extra buffer for the alcohol over a straight shot of liquor. That's why people tend to feel the effects of beer or wine a little less. But the carbon dioxide in champagne or the soda in a mixed drink increases the rate of alcohol absorption, causing a more rapid effect.

How much food is in your stomach. If you eat a meal before drinking, alcohol absorption will be considerably slower than drinking on an empty stomach.

The medications you take. Alcohol reacts negatively with more than 150 medications, including sleeping pills, blood thinners and some antidepressant and anti-anxiety drugs, according to the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information. Because drinking alcohol with some medications can increase your intoxication level, be sure to ask your doctor or pharmacist if any of the medications you take can have this effect.

Your physical and emotional health. People who are fatigued or highly stressed often have a stronger reaction to moderate amounts of alcohol.

HOLIDAY SAFETY: ALCOHOL

Holidays and special events are common opportunities to "break out the booze," even if you don't normally drink alcohol. Even if you don't buy alcoholic beverages yourself, they'll probably be offered to you frequently during holiday periods. Here are some safety facts to consider before you raise your glass.

Alternatives to Drinking Alcohol

Don't make drinking the main focus of your holiday partying. If you're the host, provide plenty of tempting and nutritious nonalcoholic foods and drinks. Starchy foods, such as pizza, cheese and crackers, and drinks such as juice, soda and nonalcoholic punch are ideal. If you're a guest, concentrate on consuming these goodies rather than alcohol. Set a limit on how much you will drink - and stick to it. Never force drinks on a guest or feel you have to drink alcohol to "get in the mood." Don't drink punch or egg nog without asking first if they are spiked with liquor. Drink the plain versions instead. As the host, close the bar at least an hour before the end of the party, even if you have to hide the liquor from guests who don't know their limit.

Driving Out of Control

One of the dangers of alcohol is that you may think you're in control of your driving, but you're not. If you're a habitual drinker, you may not feel drunk after a few drinks, but your blood alcohol level will show that you are. If friends tell you that you shouldn't drive, listen to them. Better yet, go out with a designated driver. You'll thank them when you've sobered up. Having as few as three or four drinks can double your chances of being in an accident. After seven or eight drinks, those odds increase 25 times.

Identifying Intoxicated Drivers

Even if you leave a party sober, you have to be especially cautious around holidays and other periods when parties proliferate, such as Super Bowl Sunday. It helps to be able to identify drunk drivers so that you can steer clear of them with room-and time- to spare. Here are some clues to help you identify someone who's driving under the influence of alcohol:

- Weaving, swerving or driving with tires on the lane marker
- Very slow or very fast speeds
- Inconsistent signaling
- Erratic braking or stopping without apparent cause
- Nearly striking an object or vehicle
- Driving with his or her head out the window or with the window down in cold weather
- Driving into oncoming or crossing traffic
- Driving in the dark with headlights off

Time Is the Only Cure

How soon after drinking is it safe to drive? The answer depends on how much you weigh, how much you've had to eat and how your body handles alcohol. On average, your body needs at least one hour for each drink you've had, to process and get rid of the alcohol. There's no other way to do it. Black coffee won't do it, and neither will a cold shower or other so-called remedies. Only time will make you sober enough to drive. Knowing this, plan ahead to take public transportation or a taxi - or to have a sober friend or relative give you a ride to and from holiday festivities - or ask your host if you may stay overnight.

GET SUPPORT TO BEAT BAD HABITS

People who achieve great things rarely do it alone. Athletes have coaches, presidents have advisors and writers have editors. And when trying to change an unhealthy behavior, such as smoking, drinking or overeating, teamwork is an essential part of the process. You can accomplish only so much alone. Without support, you may end up feeling bogged down and discouraged.

Every Step of the Way

Whether you are just beginning to think about changing a habit, or you have already started but have hit a rough spot, family and friends can help. For example, if you are considering quitting smoking, family and friends can help you gather information about yourself and your behavior, such as when and how often you smoke. When your quit day arrives, they can help reinforce your new habit by not smoking around you. If you feel like giving up, family and friends can remind you how far you've come and help you stay on track.

One of the things to consider as you develop an action plan for changing your habit is how your family and friends can lend a hand. People who support your efforts can make some of the obstacles to change less daunting. For instance, an understanding family member can help you identify things that trigger you to smoke, and a supportive friend can help you avoid those triggers. So be selective. Avoid seeking support from people who tend to judge or threaten to leave if you don't change. This will only undermine your efforts. You need support, not arm-twisting. You have the support of your EAP counselors – all Claremont to discuss your situation and to determine what EAP resources are available.

Learn to Lean

Remember that change is a process, so you will have good days and bad days. It's important to let people know what you're going through. The fact that you've given up a habit may shake your world. Busy loved ones may not completely understand how you feel. Try saying, "I know this isn't going to be easy -- I would really appreciate your support, especially during the tough times."

It can be hard to ask for help. Yet those who reach out often discover that the people close to them know about their problem and love them anyway. Once you have a supportive group of people, you won't have to pretend that change is easy. You can talk openly, even if you have mixed feelings about the changes ahead. Remind yourself that the rewards are not yours alone. Your loved ones can feel good about the positive change their support has made in your life.

Claremont distributes this information to provide employees with general behavioral health information. If you have concerns about these or other behavioral health issues, you can call Claremont to arrange for assistance. You will be directed to an appropriate, experienced professional who can offer guidance in a variety of work and personal matters.

For confidential help, call: 800-834-3773 or visit www.claremonteap.com.

GETTING CLEAN AND SOBER

For a chemically dependent person, the first step toward recovery is recognizing that there's a problem. The second step is to quit using the chemical, whether it's alcohol or another drug. Unless the chemicals are gotten out of the way, the chemically dependent person never can know which problems in life are drug-related and which are not. Getting sober involves the body and the mind. Learning about the process can help make it easier to start and maintain.

Body

Getting sober starts with the body. If you've been dependent on alcohol or drugs, your body has gotten used to that substance, and will take some time to adjust to being drug-free. It's best to have professional help—either from a treatment center or a doctor experienced in chemical dependency issues.

You can help your body adjust to sobriety by exercising, eating nutritious foods and getting plenty of rest. Exercise is generally healthful, and also produces endorphins, a natural body chemical that helps relieve anxiety and increase positive feelings.

It's best to build up a regular exercise program, starting small, and gradually increasing the amount you do. Be moderate. It's possible to become obsessive about exercise or injure yourself by exercising too much.

Good nutrition for sobriety requires lots of fresh vegetables, fruits and complex carbohydrates, such as whole grains. Processed foods, additives, refined sugar, caffeine and high-fat foods should be avoided. Caffeine and sugar, in particular, may tend to increase cravings for drugs or alcohol.

Getting plenty of rest is also important, as sleep helps you adjust psychologically to living a sober life. You may have trouble sleeping at first. If so, try getting more exercise.

Mind

Becoming sober involves breaking old habits that contribute to chemical dependency, learning to solve problems that chemicals allow you to ignore, and learning chemical-free ways to manage stress. We recommend the following:

- Think about situations that "trigger" you to take your drug. If possible, avoid them.
- Practice meditation, visualization or other relaxation techniques to manage stress.
- Think about the roles your friends play in your life. If some friends don't support you in sobriety, avoid their company and seek out new ones who will.
- Join a 12-step program such as Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous. Your Claremont EAP counselor can refer you to local groups that can help you maintain and enjoy sobriety. Or check your local telephone directory.

It's Your Life

In chemical dependency, your drug controls a big piece of your life. In sobriety, you get your life back, and can begin the process of making it into the life you want. Call Claremont EAP to begin the process of getting clean and sober.