NCADD
NATIONAL COUNCIL ON ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG DEPENDENCE, INC.

Alcohol is the most commonly used addictive substance in the United States- 17.6 million people, or one in every 12 adults, suffer from alcohol abuse or dependence along with several million more who engage in risky, binge drinking patterns that could lead to alcohol problems. More than half of all adults have a family history of alcoholism or problem drinking, and more than 7 million children live in a household where at least one parent is dependent on or has abused alcohol.

Yet, for many people, the Facts About Alcohol and Alcoholism are not clear.

Facts About Alcohol:

Alcohol abuse and alcoholism can affect all aspects of your life. Long-term alcohol use can cause serious health complications affecting virtually every organ in your body, including your brain. It can also damage your emotional stability, finances, career, and impact your family, friends and the people you work with.

To get a better understanding of how devastating alcoholism is in our country, here are a few figures from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

- 79,000 deaths are annually attributed to excessive alcohol use
- Alcoholism is the 3rd leading lifestyle-related cause of death in the nation
- Up to 40% of all hospital beds in the United States (except for those being used by maternity and intensive care patients) are being used to treat health conditions that are related to alcohol consumption

Over time, excessive alcohol use, both in the form of heavy drinking or binge drinking, can lead to numerous health problems, chronic diseases, neurological impairments and social problems, including but not limited to:

- Dementia, stroke and neuropathy
- Cardiovascular problems, including myocardial infarction, cardiomyopathy, atrial fibrillation and hypertension
- Psychiatric problems, including depression, anxiety, and suicide
- Social problems, including unemployment, lost productivity, family problems, violence including child maltreatment, fights and homicide
- Unintentional injuries, such as motor-vehicle traffic crashes, falls, drowning, burns and firearm injuries.
- Increased risk for many kinds of cancers, including liver, mouth, throat, larynx (voice box) and esophagus
- Liver diseases, including fatty liver, alcoholic hepatitis, cirrhosis
- Gastrointestinal problems, including pancreatitis and gastritis
- Alcohol abuse or dependence – alcoholism.

Alcoholism has little to do with what kind of alcohol one drinks, how long one has been drinking, or even exactly how much alcohol one consumes. But it has a great deal to do with a person's uncontrollable need for alcohol. Most alcoholics can't just "use a little willpower" to stop drinking. The alcoholic is frequently in the grip of a powerful craving for alcohol, a need that can feel as strong as the need for food or water. While some people are able to recover without help, the majority of alcoholics need outside assistance to recover from their disease. Yet, with support and treatment, many are able to stop drinking and reclaim their lives. (See “Stories of Recovery”)

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ’s): ALCOHOL:

Question: What is alcohol?

Answer: The alcohol that is consumed is ethyl alcohol (ethanol) and is produced by the fermentation of yeast, sugars and starches. Alcohol is a central nervous system depressant drug and ethanol is the intoxicating ingredient found in beer, wine, and liquor.

Question: What is a “standard drink” of alcohol?

Answer: A standard alcohol drink contains about 14 grams of pure alcohol (0.6 ounces):

- 12-ounces of Beer or Cooler
- 8-ounces of Malt Liquor
- 5-ounces of Wine
- 1.5-ounces or “shot” of Distilled Spirits/Liquor (e.g., rum, gin, vodka, or whiskey).

Click here to read National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) definition of a drink.

Note: These are approximate, as different brands and types of alcoholic beverages vary in their actual alcohol content.

Question: Isn’t beer or wine safer to drink than liquor?

Answer: No. One 12-ounce beer has about the same amount of alcohol as one 5-ounce glass of wine, or 1.5-ounce shot of liquor. What matters is the amount of alcohol consumed, not the type of alcoholic drink.

Question: How does alcohol affect a person?

Answer: As a central nervous system depressant drug, alcohol is rapidly absorbed by the stomach and small intestine into the bloodstream, and then circulated to every organ in the body (including the brain).

Question: How does alcohol leave the body?

Answer: Once absorbed into the bloodstream, the **Kidneys** eliminate 5% of alcohol in the urine, the **Lungs** exhale 5% of alcohol (detectable by breathalyzer) and the **Liver** breaks

down the remaining 90% of alcohol. Alcohol is broken down (metabolized) by the liver at the average rate of one standard drink per hour and nothing can speed this up, including drinking coffee.

Question: Why do people react differently to alcohol?

Answer: A variety of factors effect how people react to alcohol:

- Age, Gender, Race or Ethnicity.
- Physical condition (weight, fitness level, etc).
- Amount of food eaten before drinking alcohol.
- How quickly they drink the alcohol.
- Use of other drugs, legal (prescription medicines) or illegal (marijuana etc.)
- Family history of alcohol problems.

Question: What does "getting drunk" mean?

Answer: "Getting drunk" or becoming intoxicated results from drinking more alcohol than the body can break down, leaving the alcohol to circulate throughout the body. Alcohol intoxication can be harmful or risky for a variety of reasons:

- Impaired brain function resulting in poor judgment, reduced reaction time, loss of balance, coordination, motor skills, or slurred speech.
- Alcohol causes dilation of blood vessels producing a feeling of warmth but results in rapid loss of body heat.
- Increased risk of certain cancers, stroke, and liver diseases (e.g., cirrhosis).
- Damage to a developing fetus if consumed by a pregnant women.
- Increased risk of motor-vehicle traffic crashes, violence, and other injuries.

Question: How do I know if it's okay to drink alcohol or how much?

Answer: The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommend that if you choose to drink alcohol, **do not exceed 1 drink per day for women or 2 drinks per day for men**.

According to the Dietary Guidelines, the following people should not drink alcohol:

- Children and adolescents under the age of 21.
- Individuals of any age who cannot limit their drinking.
- Women who are pregnant or may become pregnant.
- Individuals who plan to drive a car, operate machinery, or take part in other activities that require attention, skill, or coordination.
- Individuals taking prescription or over-the-counter medications that can interact with alcohol.
- Individuals with certain medical conditions.
- Persons recovering from alcoholism.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)- ALCOHOLISM:

Question: What is alcoholism?

Answer: Alcoholism, also known as alcohol dependence, includes the following four symptoms:

- **Craving** -- A strong need, or urge, to drink
- **Loss of Control** -- Not being able to stop drinking once drinking has begun
- **Physical Dependence** -- Withdrawal symptoms, such as nausea, sweating, shakiness, and anxiety after stopping drinking
- **Tolerance** -- The need to drink greater amounts of alcohol to get "high"

Question: Is alcoholism a disease?

Answer: Yes, alcoholism is a disease. Like many other diseases, alcoholism is chronic, meaning that it lasts a person's lifetime; it usually follows a predictable course; and it has symptoms.

Question: Is alcoholism genetically inherited?

Answer: Research shows that the risk for developing alcoholism runs in families. But just because there is a genetic predisposition doesn't mean that the child of an alcoholic parent will automatically become an alcoholic. Not all children of alcoholic families get into trouble with alcohol. And some people develop alcoholism even though no one in their family has a drinking problem.

Lifestyle is a critical factor, as well. Your friends, the amount of stress in your life, and how readily alcohol is available are factors that may increase your risk for alcoholism.

Question: Can alcoholism be cured?

Answer: No, alcoholism cannot be cured at this time. Even if an alcoholic hasn't been drinking for a long time, he or she can still suffer a relapse. Not drinking is the safest course for most people with alcoholism.

Question: Can alcoholism be treated?

Answer: Yes, alcoholism can be treated. Alcoholism treatment programs use both counseling and medications to help a person stop drinking. Treatment has helped many people stop drinking, rebuild their lives and life a life in long-term recovery.