

April is Alcohol Awareness Month

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, alcohol is the most-used intoxicating substance in the United States with 82 percent of people age 12 and older having used alcohol at least once in their lifetimes. An estimated 109 million people have used alcohol in the past month. How do we define “alcohol problem”?

Risky Drinking

This is typically defined as consuming alcohol in a way that may pose a risk of physical or emotional harm to the drinker or others but has not produced effects that would result in a diagnosis of alcohol abuse or dependence problems. Risky drinking includes heavy or excessive drinking, such as binge drinking (drinking four or more drinks on a single occasion for females and five or more drinks for males). It also includes drinking in situations that increase the risk of harm, such as before or while driving, while pregnant, or while taking certain medications. Identifying risky drinking behavior may lead to the early detection and prevention of the more serious problems of alcohol abuse and dependence.

Alcohol Abuse

A person who frequently engages in risky drinking may have a more severe problem. Alcohol abuse is the regular use of alcohol despite recurrent adverse consequences such as

- Repeated failure to fulfill obligations at work, school, or home.
- Recurrent use of alcohol in situations which are harmful, such as driving.
- Continued use of alcohol after experiencing social or personal problems.

Alcohol Dependence

This is the most severe alcohol related problem. It is also called alcoholism or alcohol addiction. An individual has become alcohol dependent when he or she experiences three or more of the following in a 12 month period:

- Tolerance – the need for increasing amounts of alcohol to reach intoxication.
- Withdrawal- the occurrence of physical symptoms when heavy alcohol use is reduced or stopped.
- Drinking larger amounts or drinking over a longer period than was intended.
- A persistent desire or unsuccessful efforts to cut down on or control alcohol use.
- Giving up or reducing activities because of alcohol use.
- Continuing to use alcohol after experiencing physical or psychological problems that were caused or made worst by alcohol use.

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