

Alcohol Abuse

You may be asking yourself some questions about alcohol use. These questions might include:

1. How do I know if I or someone else has a problem with drinking?
2. What is an alcoholic?
3. What are standard drinks and how much is too much for my body, age, gender, etc.?
4. What are the treatment options for someone with alcohol use or abuse problems?

These are very common questions and are a good place to start if you are thinking about doing something about your alcohol issues. Here are some general answers to these questions:

1. There are a number of ways to tell if a person has a "problem" with alcohol. Current diagnostic manuals such as the ICD-10 and the DSM have very specific definitions, but a more general one is -- "a person is abusing alcohol when life at work and at home are seriously disrupted" (Psychology Today website: <http://www.psychologytoday.com/conditions/alcohol-abuse>).
2. An alcoholic is someone who is affected by alcoholism, which the Mayo Clinic defines as "a chronic and often progressive disease that includes problems controlling your drinking, being preoccupied with alcohol, continuing to use alcohol even when it causes problems, having to drink more to get the same effect (physical dependence), or having withdrawal symptoms when you rapidly decrease or stop drinking" (Mayo Clinic website: <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/alcoholism/DS00340>).

Another way to assess the degree of problem with alcohol is through a simple test called the Michigan Alcohol Screening Test (MAST) which is one of the oldest, most accurate, and most widely used screening tests in the field. Here is a link to this test: <http://alcoholism.about.com/od/tests/a/mast.htm>

3. A standard drink is "any drink that contains about 14 grams of pure alcohol (about 0.6 fluid ounces or 1.2 tablespoons), as stated on the National Institute on Alcoholism and Alcohol website in the U.S. http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/Practitioner/pocketguide/pocket_guide2.htm
This site also contains a chart of average standard drink equivalents as well as the number of standard drinks in different container sizes for each beverage.

4. Some effective treatments for alcohol problems include:
 - a. Medication, which is used to assist with withdrawal from alcohol as well as to re-establish brain function, curb urges to use, and prevent relapse; and
 - b. Behavioural treatments, which may be outpatient or inpatient, and can involve cognitive-behavioural therapy, motivational interviewing, multidimensional family therapy, or motivational incentives (more detail on these treatments can be found at <http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/treatment-approaches-drug-addiction>)

If the above information has you wondering more about alcohol and alcohol problems, or if you would like help with treatment of such a problem, contact us. We have clinicians who specialize in this area (e.g., Vanessa Hornal, Clark Sim, Paul Knox) and are ready to help you get started on your journey to improved health.