



Sedgwick County...
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Recognizing a Drinking Problem

I drink alcohol almost every day, and occasionally, I drink to the point that I don't remember things. Do I have a problem with alcohol? What are the symptoms of an alcohol use problem?

Do you know that a few mild symptoms, which you might not see as trouble signs, can signal the start of a drinking problem? Some people may drink occasionally, but can also unwind or enjoy social events without drinking. However, other people may regularly drink above recommended limits (one drink per day for women and older people, two drinks per day for men); or may feel like they need alcohol in order to relax, have a good time, or feel better. If you find yourself needing to drink, you may have an alcohol problem. Doctors diagnose an alcohol use disorder, generally known as alcohol abuse or alcoholism, when a patient's drinking causes distress or harm. Do you recognize any of these symptoms in yourself or a family member?

In the past year, have you (check all that apply):

- had times when you ended up drinking more, or longer, than you intended?
- more than once wanted to cut down or stop drinking, or tried to, but couldn't?
- more than once got into situations while or after drinking that increased your chances of getting hurt (such as driving, swimming, using machinery, walking in a dangerous area, or having unsafe sex)?
- had to drink much more than before to get the effect you want? Or found that your usual number of drinks had much less effect than before?
- continued to drink even though it was making you feel depressed or anxious or adding to another health problem? Or after having a memory blackout?
- spent a lot of time drinking? Or being sick or getting over the aftereffects?
- continued to drink even though it was causing trouble with your family or friends?
- found that drinking or being sick from drinking often interfered with taking care of your home or family? Or caused problems at work or school?
- given up or cut back on activities that were important or interesting to you, or gave you pleasure, in order to drink?
- more than once gotten arrested, been held at a police station, or had other legal problems because of your drinking?
- found that when the effects of alcohol were wearing off, you had withdrawal symptoms, such as trouble sleeping, shakiness, restlessness, nausea, sweating, a racing heart, or a seizure? Or sensed things that were not there?

You may have heard that light to moderate drinking can be good for the heart. With heavy or at-risk drinking, however, any potential benefits are outweighed by greater risks, including injuries. Drinking too much increases your chances of being injured or even killed. Alcohol is a factor, for example, in about 60 percent of fatal burn injuries, drownings, and homicides; 50 percent of severe trauma injuries and sexual assaults; and 40 percent of fatal motor vehicle crashes, suicides, and fatal falls. Heavy drinkers have a greater risk of liver disease, heart disease, sleep disorders, depression, stroke, bleeding from the stomach, sexually transmitted infections from unsafe sex, and several types of cancer. They may have problems managing diabetes, high blood pressure, and other conditions. Drinking during pregnancy can cause brain damage and other serious problems in the baby. Because it is not yet known whether any amount of alcohol is safe for a developing baby, women who are pregnant or may become pregnant should not drink alcohol. Beyond these physical and mental health risks, frequent heavy drinking also is linked with personal problems, including losing privileges, such as driving, and relationship troubles.

Most people don't realize when they're drinking at a risk level. When most people think of someone who has a drinking problem, they think of an individual whose life is falling apart, but that only really occurs with the most severe cases of alcoholism. Seek help from your family physician or an addiction professional if you feel you have a problem and want to talk with someone confidentially. Take charge of your health and your life. If you think you may have a problem, call COMCARE's Addiction Treatment Services at 316-660-7540.