



A Program of Conley Outreach Community Services
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In This Issue

According to a recent Gallup Poll, one third of Americans report that alcohol has caused problems in their immediate family. This issue will explore adult drinking and alcoholism. The information is taken from the US Department of Justice report, "Drinking in America" and literature from Prevention First and the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.

Alcohol: How Large a Problem?

A large majority of Americans over the age of 21 either do not drink or drink infrequently. According to research by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 20% of the adult population has a significant problem with **binge drinking** (i.e. drinking five or more drinks at one time). **Binge drinkers drink 83% of all the alcohol consumed by adults in this country.** About six percent of the population are **frequent binge drinkers**, consuming five or more drinks at a time, five or more times a month. **They drink 50% of the alcohol.**

What is Alcohol Abuse?

Alcohol abuse is any drinking that harms or endangers the drinker or other people. Alcohol abuse can lead to:

- **Highway Deaths**—Alcohol-related crashes killed over 17,400 people in 2002 and injured another 500,000.

- **Crime**—Many homicides and other serious crimes involve alcohol (by the criminal and/or victim)
- **Domestic Violence**—Alcohol is a factor in many cases of partner and child abuse.
- **Problems at Work**—These include job losses, injuries, and billions of dollars in lost productivity.
- **Problems at Home**—Alcohol abuse is a factor in many divorces. In extreme cases, alcohol abuse has led to homelessness.
- **Health Problems**—Alcohol abuse can result in malnutrition, brain damage or mental health problems, cancer, heart disease, liver damage and stomach ulcers.

When Does Drinking Become a Problem?

There are 10 common signs that a person may have an alcohol problem:

1. Drinking to calm nerves, forget worries or boost a sad mood
2. Guilt about drinking
3. Unsuccessful attempts to cut down/stop drinking
4. Lying about or hiding drinking habits
5. Causing harm to oneself or someone else as a result of drinking
6. Needing to drink increasingly greater amounts in order to achieve desired effect
7. Feeling irritable, resentful or unreasonable when not drinking

8. Medical, social family or financial problems caused by drinking
9. Spending a great deal of time getting alcohol and drinking alcohol
10. Drinking in risky situations such as before driving or before engaging in unwanted/unprotected sex.

Could Grandma Have a Problem?

For 10 percent of people older than 65, and 40 percent of people in nursing homes, alcohol abuse is a serious problem. It often goes unnoticed because its symptoms mirror that of aging and dementia: confusion, depression, anxiety, muscoskeletal pain and insomnia. Not only are alcohol problems harder to detect in senior citizens, but drinking can be more dangerous due to drug interaction. While some elderly drinkers are chronic alcoholics who have been abusing alcohol since youth, **more than one third of older problem drinkers began drinking after the age of 55.**

The trauma of losing a spouse or close friends, retirement, relocating, and the stress of poor health can trigger alcohol abuse. Seniors who live alone or who have lost their social support system are at the greatest risk for developing alcohol problems. Those who are no longer working or who must rely on their children or others for care may also feel useless and unwanted. Alcohol becomes a way to cope with the pain and loneliness associated with aging.

What Can I Do to Help?

If you are worried that a friend, neighbor or family member has a drinking problem, it is important to talk with them about your concerns.

- **Choose a good time to talk to the person**, such as soon after an alcohol-related problem has

occurred. Choose a time when he or she is sober, when both of you are calm and you can speak privately.

- **Be specific.** Tell the friend that you are concerned about his or her drinking and want to be supportive in getting help. Back up your concern with examples of the ways his or her drinking has caused problems, including the most recent incident.
- **Don't make excuses for the person's behavior.** Many make the mistake of trying to protect a friend/family member from the consequences of his/her behavior by making excuses to others. Making excuses and "covering" allows that person to avoid changing his/her behavior.
- **Seek out and use resources.** There are several agencies and organizations in the area with excellent programs to help with alcohol related problems. Do what you can to encourage your friend or family member to use these resources, but remember they must make the decision to get help. Seek help for yourself, if the person's drinking problem is affecting you.

Outpatient /Inpatient Programs

<i>Breaking Free</i>	897-1003
<i>Renz Addition Counseling Center</i>	513-6886
<i>Community Counseling Center</i>	966-7400
<i>Ben Gordon Center</i>	815/756-4875
<i>Alcoholics Anonymous</i>	377-6610
	859-2444
<i>ALANON</i>	896-5552
<i>Lazarus House Heroin Support Group</i>	587-2144