

Report to the Boards of Health

Jennifer Morse, MD, MPH, FAAFP, Medical Director

Mid-Michigan District Health Department, Wednesday, April 26, 2023
 Central Michigan District Health Department, Wednesday, April 26, 2023
 District Health Department 10, Friday, April 28, 2023

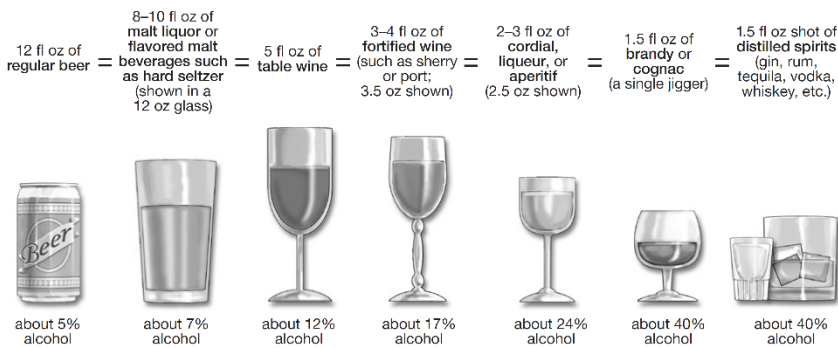


April is Alcohol Awareness Month

April is Alcohol Awareness Month. Alcohol use disorder (AUD) is difficulty stopping or controlling alcohol use even when it is causing problems with your health, job, or social situations. This term covers other conditions such as alcohol abuse, dependence, or alcoholism. Alcohol misuse includes binge drinking and heavy drinking. Binge drinking is typically 4 or more drinks for a woman or 5 or more drinks for a man within about 2 hours. Heavy alcohol use for men is more than 4 drinks in any one day or more than 14 drinks total per week and for women more than 3 drinks on any one day or more than 7 drinks per week.

WHAT'S A "STANDARD DRINK"?

In the United States, a "standard drink" (also known as an alcoholic drink-equivalent) is defined as any beverage containing 0.6 fluid ounces or 14 grams of pure alcohol. Although the drinks pictured here are different sizes, each contains approximately the same amount of alcohol and counts as one U.S. standard drink or one alcoholic drink equivalent.



Each drink shown above represents one U.S. standard drink and has an equivalent amount (0.6 fluid ounces) of "pure" ethanol. Each beverage portrayed above represents one standard drink (or one alcoholic drink equivalent), defined in the United States as any beverage containing 0.6 fl oz or 14 grams of pure alcohol. The percentage of pure alcohol, expressed here as alcohol by volume (alc/vol), varies within and across beverage types. Although the standard drink amounts are helpful for following health guidelines, they may not reflect customary serving sizes.

HOW MANY DRINKS ARE IN COMMON CONTAINERS?

The table below shows the approximate number of standard drinks (or alcoholic drink equivalents) found in common containers.

regular beer (5% alc/vol)	malt liquor (7% alc/vol)	table wine (12% alc/vol)	80-proof distilled spirits (40% alc/vol)
12 fl oz = 1	12 fl oz = 1½	750 ml (a regular wine bottle) = 5	a shot (1.5 oz glass/50 ml bottle) = 1
16 fl oz = 1½	16 fl oz = 2		a mixed drink or cocktail = 1 or more
22 fl oz = 2	22 fl oz = 2½		200 ml (a "half pint") = 4½
40 fl oz = 3½	40 fl oz = 4½		375 ml (a "pint" or "half bottle") = 8½
			750 ml (a "fifth") = 17

According to the 2021 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), 84% of people ages 18 and older have had alcohol at some point in their lifetimes and 52% drank within the last month. For those ages 12 to 17, 23% had alcohol at some point in their lifetime and 48% drank in the past month. Binge drinking was reported in the past month by 4% of 12- to 17-year-olds and 23% of people ages 18 and older. Heavy alcohol use was reported in the past month by 0.4% of 12- to 17-year-olds and 6% of people ages 18 and older.

Alcohol consumption rose in the US during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic period, mainly due to increased frequency of drinking. One study result found the largest increases were among women and African Americans. Before the pandemic, alcohol consumption had already been increasing over the previous 20 years despite decreases in underage and binge drinking. It is thought this increase had been driven in part by heavier drinking in middle-aged and older adults.

There are numerous health problems associated with drinking alcohol.

Blackouts can occur while intoxicated,

which is due to the alcohol blocking the transfer of memories from the short- to long-term storage in our brain. Excessive alcohol intake is associated with cancers of the mouth, esophagus, larynx, pharynx, liver, colon, breast, and rectum. It is also associated with cirrhosis (liver disease), pancreatitis, heart damage, osteoporosis, low blood production, accidents, trauma, violence, suicide, gout, neuropathy, and dementia. People who misuse alcohol

may also have problems managing conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, pain, and sleep disorders. People who misuse alcohol are more likely to engage in unsafe sexual behavior, putting themselves and others at risk for sexually transmitted infections and unintentional pregnancies. Women seem to be more susceptible to the consequences of alcohol use, including liver disease, heart disease, nerve damage, and blackouts. This is likely because women have less water in their body as compared to men. Alcohol use during pregnancy can result in brain damage and other serious problems in babies, referred to as fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS).

Alcohol use is also intertwined with our mental health. Many use alcohol to alter their mood, using it to deal with their feelings, emotions, or situations they find difficult. Unfortunately, people who use higher amounts of alcohol are at higher risk of having poor mental health. It is very common for mental health problems and alcohol use problems to co-exist.

It is estimated that more than 140,000 people (approximately 97,000 men and 43,000 women) die from alcohol-related causes annually, making alcohol the fourth-leading preventable cause of death in the United States behind tobacco, poor diet and physical inactivity, and illegal drugs. In 2020, 30% of all driving deaths involved an alcohol-impaired driver. Review of suicides from 1995-2019 found that 21% had a blood alcohol concentration of 0.1% or more. Alcohol use disorder is involved in about 1 in 4 deaths by suicide. Alcohol contributes to approximately 19% of emergency department visits and 22% of overdose deaths related to prescription opioids. Alcohol is a factor in about 50% of fatal drownings and of homicides, and about 65% of fatal falls. In addition, a significant number of sexual assaults involve alcohol use.

Some who drink do develop alcohol dependence, also called alcoholism. In this chronic disease, people crave alcohol and cannot control their drinking. Over time, they need to drink greater amounts to get the same effect. If they stop drinking, they get withdrawal symptoms, typically within 24 hours. If severe withdrawal is not medically managed it can lead to death.

Alcohol Withdrawal Phases and Symptoms		
Phase of Withdrawal	Symptoms	Time from Last Drink
Minor withdrawal	Shaky/tremors, mild anxiety, headache, sweating, palpitations, loss of appetite, stomach upset	6 to 36 hours
Seizures	Single or brief flurry of generalized seizures, status epilepticus (non-stop seizure) is rare	6 to 48 hours
Alcoholic hallucinosis	Visual, auditory, and/or tactile hallucinations (seeing, hearing, and/or feeling things that aren't there)	12 to 48 hours
Delirium tremens (DTs)	Delirium (confused thinking and lack of awareness), agitation, tachycardia (fast heart rate), high blood pressure, fever (can be very high), sweating, heart failure, electrolyte abnormalities, heart rhythm abnormalities, death	48 to 96 hours

Drinking less alcohol is best for health, however most adults can choose to drink in moderation which is no more than 2 drinks in a day for men and no more than 1 drink in a day for a woman. For some, it is safest to avoid all alcohol, and this includes those that are pregnant or could be pregnant, are taking medication that interacts with alcohol, have a medical problem that can be made worse by drinking, are under 21, and are recovering from AUD or unable to control the amount they drink. Anyone planning to drive, operate machinery, or participate in complicated activities should avoid alcohol.

The questions listed below are based on the symptoms used to diagnose AUD. Having two or three of the symptoms listed suggests mild AUD, four to five symptoms suggest moderate AUD, and six or more suggests severe AUD.

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?
- Spent a lot of time drinking, being sick from drinking, or getting over other aftereffects?
- Wanted a drink so badly you couldn't think of anything else?
- Found that drinking—or being sick from drinking—often interfered with taking care of your home or family? Or caused job troubles? Or school problems?
- Continued to drink even though it was causing trouble with your family or friends?
- Given up or cut back on activities that were important or interesting to you, or gave you pleasure, to drink?
- More than once gotten 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 engaging in unsafe sexual behavior)?
- Continued to drink even though it was making you feel depressed or anxious or adding to another health problem? Or after having had an alcohol-related memory blackout?
- Had you drink much more than you once did to get the effect you want? Or found that your usual number of drinks had much less effect than before?
- 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, dysphoria (feeling uneasy or unhappy), malaise (general sense of being unwell), feeling low, or a seizure? Or sensed things that were not there?

Alcohol use disorders can be treated with psychosocial therapy and/or medications. For those looking for more information, talk to your healthcare provider, or find more information at:

- <https://alcoholtreatment.niaaa.nih.gov/>
- <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>
- <https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/keep-mi-healthy/mentalhealth/drugcontrol/treatment>

Recommendations:

1. Keep track of your own alcohol use and decide if you should consider cutting back.
2. Encourage parents, teachers, and other trusted adults to discuss alcohol abuse with children.
 - a. Resources:
 - i. <https://knowwhenknowhow.org/>
 - ii. <https://asklistenlearn.org/>
 - iii. <https://talksooner.org/alcohol/>
 - iv. <https://drugfree.org/drugs/alcohol/>
 - v. <https://notmykid.org/>
 - vi. <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures-and-fact-sheets/make-a-difference-child-alcohol>
3. If someone you care about struggles with alcohol, it may take them time to be ready for change. Tips for talking to them are available at <https://alcoholtreatment.niaaa.nih.gov/support-through-the-process/starting-the-conversation>. This link also has resources to help you get support.

Sources

- National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Alcohol Use in the United States. <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohols-effects-health/alcohol-topics/alcohol-facts-and-statistics/alcohol-use-united-states>
- National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Alcohol Facts and Statistics. <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohols-effects-health/alcohol-topics/alcohol-facts-and-statistics>
- National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Alcohol-Related Emergencies and Deaths in the United States. <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohols-effects-health/alcohol-topics/alcohol-facts-and-statistics/alcohol-related-emergencies-and-deaths-united-states>
- Kerr, William C., et al. "Longitudinal assessment of drinking changes during the pandemic: The 2021 COVID-19 follow-up study to the 2019 to 2020 National Alcohol Survey." *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research* 46.6 (2022): 1050-1061.
- National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Rethink Your Drink. https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/sites/default/files/publications/NIAAA_RethinkingDrinking.pdf
- Mental Health Foundation. Cheers? https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/15771/1/cheers_report%5B1%5D.pdf