

Learning About High-Risk Alcohol Use

What is High-Risk Alcohol Use?

Alcohol use can be mild, moderate or severe. Heavy drinking is¹:


4 or more drinks per day or **8 or more drinks per week**


5 or more drinks per day or **15 or more drinks per week**

Effects and Risks of Alcohol Use

Alcohol can make you feel happy or relaxed, but it can also make you feel far away or detached. Heavy drinking can cause or worsen physical, mental health and social problems, such as:

- Stomach pain and vomiting
- Craving alcohol
- Feeling irritable or anxious
- Getting into dangerous situations
- Risk for injury
- Missing important events
- Liver or heart disease and cancer

Understanding Alcohol Dependence and Withdrawal

People can develop alcohol dependence, which means that the body starts to expect and need alcohol daily or they will go into withdrawal. Effects of alcohol withdrawal²:

- Headaches
- Anxiety, nervousness or irritability
- Trouble sleeping
- Upset stomach
- Heart racing or high blood pressure
- Heavy sweating or high body temperature
- Tremor (shakiness) of hands or other body parts
- Hallucinations
- Seizures
- Confusion and not knowing where you are

If a person is dependent on alcohol, stopping abruptly (going “cold turkey”) can be dangerous, can cause seizures, and even death. Alcohol withdrawal can be avoided by drinking a little bit less each day, or seeing a medical provider who specializes in treatment of alcohol dependence.

Go to the nearest emergency room or call 911 if you are experiencing concerning symptoms of alcohol withdrawal.

Medications for Alcohol Use

There are medications that can help reduce alcohol use and cravings. Some medications can be taken even if you continue to drink and will not make you feel sick. Learn more [here](#).

Talk to a doctor about:

- Naltrexone tablets/ injections (Vivitrol)
- Acamprosate (Campral)
- Disulfiram (Antabuse)
- Gabapentin (Neurontin)
- Topiramate (Topamax)
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1: [Drinking Levels and Patterns Defined - NIH](#) 2: [Alcohol Withdrawal – Cleveland Clinic](#)

Harm Reduction Tips for Alcohol Use



Switch from a strong to a weaker drink, such as from hard alcohol to beer.



Eat a full meal before drinking and drink water between each drink.



Start low, go slow.
Space out your drinks, pour drinks into cups or drink one drink an hour.



Speak to a medical provider about medications to reduce alcohol use, such as naltrexone (vivitrol).



Avoid mixing alcohol with opioids, benzos, or other drugs.
Continue taking necessary medications and speak to a doctor about mixing safely.



Cut down slowly, rather than going "cold turkey."
Drink just enough to prevent withdrawal symptoms and drink a bit less each day.



Set goals & keep track.
Decide how many drinks you will have in advance or keep track of your drinks.



When intoxicated, avoid dangerous people and places such as stairs, streets and the subway platform.



Set limits for yourself.
Avoid drinking with a person you go overboard with. Wait until as late in the day as possible to start drinking.



Consider supportive programs such as SMART Recovery.

Get Into Care

- **H+H ExpressCare:** Virtual urgent care for medical issues including alcohol use treatment and medication. Available 24/7 in over 200 languages. (845) 397-2273 | www.expresscare.nyc/dhs.
- **988:** Call, text or [visit online](#). 24/7 for counseling and linkage to care.