



Alcohol Abuse and Dependency

Know the signs

Alcohol abuse and dependency are increasing among women who were born after 1945. Also, alcohol causes more health problems in women than in men, including heart, liver, and brain damage.

Know the signs of alcohol abuse. Talk with your health care provider if you need help.

What is alcohol abuse?

- Heavy drinking for a woman is 3 or more drinks a day.
- Binge drinking for a woman is 3 or more drinks, one after the other.
- Alcoholics are people who depend emotionally or physically on alcohol. They:
 - Are preoccupied with drinking
 - Crave alcohol
 - Need more drinks than non-alcoholics to feel the effects of alcohol
 - Feel shaky, have seizures, or hallucinate (see things that are not there) after stopping drinking (withdrawal)

How do I know if alcohol is a problem for me?

Alcohol is a problem if 3 or more of these things occur in 1 year:

- You give up or reduce your social, work-related, or recreational activities because of alcohol use.
- You consume alcohol in larger amounts over a longer period than you intend to.
- You cannot stop or cut down drinking.
- Your drinking continues even though you know it will cause physical or social problems.
- You spend a lot of time:
 - Making sure you have what you need to drink
 - Drinking
 - Recovering from the effects of drinking

Questions ?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

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- You have nausea, sweating, shakiness, and anxiety when you stop alcohol after a period of heavy drinking (withdrawal symptoms).
- You need more and more alcohol to feel its effects.

The 4 CAGE Questions

To find out if you have a problem with alcohol, you may want to ask yourself the 4 **CAGE*** questions. The 4 letters of "CAGE" stand for:

- Cut back
- Annoyed
- Guilty
- Eye-opener

Ask yourself these questions:

1. Have I ever felt the need to **cut back** on how much I drink?
2. Have people ever **annoyed** me by criticizing my drinking habits?
3. Have I ever felt **guilty** while I was drinking?
4. Have I ever started the day with an "**eye-opener**" drink to wake myself up, help myself relax, or cure a hangover?

If you answered "yes" to 1 or more of these questions, you may have a problem with alcohol.

Getting Help

Talk with your health care provider if you think you have a problem with alcohol or you would like more information. Your provider can refer you to resources that can help.

*From: Ewing, J.A. (1984) Detecting alcoholism: the CAGE questionnaire. *JAMA*, 252:1905-1907.

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