

# Developing a Better Understanding



*How do you know if drinking alcohol has become a problem for you or a loved one? And where do you go for help if it has?*

*One way is to learn more about Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD). AUD is a medical diagnosis that ranges from moderate to severe, with the severity based on several criteria. But, briefly, alcohol becomes a problem when it impacts your life in a negative way.*

*For example, is your personal or work life deteriorating because of your drinking? Have you had times when you drank more, or longer, than you intended? Are you drinking to feel better? Are you drinking to cope with stress or other problems? Do you feel anxious or irritable without a drink?*

*For more information about the criteria for AUD, see <https://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/dsmfactsheet/dsmfact.htm>.*

*~Source: NIAAA*

## Enhancing Alcohol Awareness

Alcohol Awareness Month is observed every April. The goal of Alcohol Awareness Month is to increase awareness and understanding of the impact of alcohol and alcohol use disorder (AUD), while also highlighting available treatments and supports. The National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism states that alcohol use disorder (AUD) is a medical condition characterized by an impaired ability to stop or control alcohol use despite adverse social, occupational, or health consequences. It encompasses the conditions that some people refer to as alcohol abuse, alcohol dependence, alcohol addiction, and the colloquial term, alcoholism. Considered a brain disorder, AUD can be mild, moderate, or severe. Lasting changes in the brain caused by alcohol misuse perpetuate AUD and make individuals vulnerable to relapse. The good news is that no matter how severe the problem may seem, evidence-based treatment with behavioral therapies, mutual-support groups, and/or medications can help people with AUD achieve and maintain recovery.

### What Are the Types of Treatment for AUD?

Several evidence-based treatment approaches are available for AUD. One size does not fit all and a treatment approach that may work for one person may not work for another. Treatment can be outpatient and/or inpatient and be provided by specialty programs, therapists, and doctors.

#### *Medications*

Three medications are currently approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to help people stop or reduce their drinking and prevent relapse: naltrexone (oral and long-acting injectable), acamprosate, and disulfiram. All these medications are non-addictive, and they may be used alone or combined with behavioral treatments or mutual-support groups.

#### *Behavioral Treatments*

Behavioral treatments, also known as alcohol counseling or “talk therapy,” provided by licensed therapists are aimed at changing drinking behavior. Examples of behavioral treatments are brief interventions and reinforcement approaches, treatments that build motivation and teach skills for coping and preventing relapse, and mindfulness-based therapies.

#### *Mutual-Support Groups*

Mutual-support groups, including Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and others, provide peer support for stopping or reducing drinking. Group meetings are available in most communities, at low or no cost, at convenient times and locations—including an increasing presence online. This means they can be especially helpful to individuals at risk for relapse to drinking. Combined with medications and behavioral treatment provided by health professionals, mutual-support groups can offer a valuable added layer of support.

### *Understanding Alcohol Withdrawal Risks*

People with severe AUD may need medical help to avoid alcohol withdrawal if they decide to stop drinking. Alcohol withdrawal is a potentially life-threatening process that can occur when someone who has been drinking heavily for a prolonged period of time suddenly stops drinking. Doctors can prescribe medications to address these symptoms and make the process safer and less distressing.

### *Can People With AUD Recover?*

Many people with AUD do recover, but setbacks are common among people in treatment. Seeking professional help early can prevent relapse to drinking. Behavioral therapies can help people develop skills to avoid and overcome triggers, such as stress, that might lead to drinking. Medications also can help deter drinking during times when individuals may be at greater risk of relapse (e.g., divorce, death of a family member).

## **Alcohol Facts and Stats**

### **Prevalence of Drinking:**

- According to the 2019 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), 85.6 percent of people ages 18 and older reported that they drank alcohol at some point in their lifetime, 69.5 percent reported that they drank in the past year, and 54.9 percent (59.1 percent of men in this age group and 51.0 percent of women in this age group) reported that they drank in the past month.

### **Prevalence of Binge Drinking and Heavy Alcohol Use:**

- In 2019, 25.8 percent of people ages 18 and older (29.7 percent of men in this age group and 22.2 percent of women in this age group) reported that they engaged in binge drinking in the past month, and 6.3 percent (8.3 percent of men in this age group and 4.5 percent of women in this age group) reported that they engaged in heavy alcohol use in the past month.

### **Treatment of AUD in the US:**

- According to the 2019 NSDUH, about 7.2 percent of people ages 12 and older who had AUD in the past year received any treatment in the past year. This includes about 6.9 percent of males and 7.8 percent of females with past-year AUD in this age group.
- According to the 2019 NSDUH, about 6.4 percent of adolescents ages 12 to 17 who had AUD in the past year received any treatment in the past year. This includes about 6.4 percent of males and 6.4 percent of females with past-year AUD in this age group.

### **Alcohol-Related Emergencies and Deaths in the US:**

- The rate of all alcohol-related ED visits increased 47 percent between 2006 and 2014, which translates to an average annual increase of 210,000 alcohol-related ED visits.
- Alcohol contributes to about 18.5 percent of ED visits and 22.1 percent of overdose deaths related to prescription opioids.
- In 2019, alcohol-impaired driving fatalities accounted for 10,142 deaths (28.0 percent of overall driving fatalities).

### **Alcohol-Involved Deaths in Franklin County, Ohio:**

- From January to September 2019 to 2020, there was a 45.6% increase in alcohol-involved deaths in Franklin County. In Franklin County from January to September 2019 there were 68 overdose deaths and for January-September 2020 there were 99 overdose deaths.

### *Sources*