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## Alcohol and Other Drugs Fact Sheet

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### **Alcohol and Other Drugs: Abuse and Addiction**

Substance abuse and addiction affect an estimated 25 million Americans. This includes alcoholism, which afflicts 10 million adults and 3 million children, and 12.5 million Americans who are addicted to other drugs, such as sedative-hypnotics, opiates, sedatives, hallucinogens and psychostimulants.

Substance abusers face substantial health risks, as well as risks of criminal victimization and damaging effects on their socioeconomic status. There are a variety of treatments available, and appropriately administered treatment can be very effective. Family support can also be beneficial.

### **What Is Addiction?**

Addiction is a chronic, progressive, relapsing disease that can be characterized by one or more of the following:

- **Craving:** A strong need or compulsion to drink or use drugs
- **Loss of control:** The inability to limit one's drinking or drug use on any given occasion
- **Physical dependence:** The occurrence of withdrawal symptoms, such as nausea, sweating, shakiness and anxiety when alcohol or drug use is stopped
- **Tolerance:** The need for increasing amounts of alcohol or other drugs in order to get "high"

### **What Is Abuse?**

Abuse differs from addiction in that it does not include an extremely long craving for a substance, loss of control, or physical dependence. It is also less likely to include tolerance. Abuse is described as a pattern of drinking or using other drugs, accompanied by one or more of the following in a 12-month period:

- Failure to fulfill major work, school, or home responsibilities
- Situations that are physically dangerous, such as driving a car or operating machinery while under the influence of substances
- Recurring substance-related legal problems, such as being arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol or physically hurting someone else while being drunk
- Continued drinking despite having on-going relationship problems that are caused or worsened by the effects of alcohol

### **Why Do People Abuse Alcohol or Other Drugs?**

Abuse of alcohol and other drugs is caused by biological, psychological and social factors. Research has shown that some people have a biological disposition to alcohol/drug addiction.

Psychological and social factors can influence a biological disposition and can effect whether or not a person becomes dependent on alcohol or drugs. Negative factors include traumatic or stressful events; childhood neglect; mental health disorders; disabilities; parental alcohol/drug addition; traumatic experiences; and other adverse events.

### **Warning Signs of Alcohol/Drug Addiction**

- Using the substance on a regular basis (daily, weekends or in binges)

- Tolerance for the substance
- Failed attempts to stop using the substance
- Physical and/or psychological dependence
- Withdrawal symptoms (trembling, hallucinations, sweating or high blood pressure)
- Dementia
- Often people with depression or bipolar disorder “self-medicate” with alcohol or drugs

### **How Prevalent Are Alcohol and Drugs Among Young People?**

Among adolescents ages 12-17 years, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (SAMHSA) 1999 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse:

- 10.4 million were current drinkers; 6.8 engaged in binge drinking; and 2.1 million were heavy drinkers
- 10.9% reported current use of illegal drugs
- 7.7% were current users of marijuana
- 14.9% smoke cigarettes currently

### **Common Legal and Illegal Drugs Used by Young People**

- **Alcohol:** This includes beer, wine and hard liquor. It is a myth that beer is not alcohol.
- **Tobacco:** Teens who smoke are three times more likely than nonsmokers to use alcohol, eight times more likely to use marijuana, and 22 times more likely to use cocaine. Smoking is associated with a host of other risky behaviors, such as fighting and engaging in unprotected sex.
- **Prescribed medications:** Medications such as diet pills, pain medication, Ritalin, etc.
- **Inhalants:** Inhaling the fumes of common household products, known by such street names as huffing, sniffing and wanging, can cause serious respiratory problems, permanent brain damage and death.
- **Over-the-counter medications:** Cough and cold, such as Coricidin; sleep; and diet drugs.
- **Marijuana:** The most commonly used illicit drug.
- **Stimulants:** Possible long-term effects include tolerance and dependence, violence and aggression, and malnutrition due to suppression of appetite.
- **Cocaine and Crack Cocaine:** Crack, a smokeable form of cocaine, is a powerfully addictive stimulant. In 1997, an estimated 1.5 million Americans, age 12 and older, were chronic cocaine users.
- **Club Drugs:** This term refers to drugs being used by teens and young adults at all-night dance parties such as “raves” or “trances,” dance clubs, and bars. MDMA (Ecstasy), GHB, Rohypnol (Rohies), ketamine, methamphetamine, and LSD are some of these popular drugs. Because some club drugs are colorless, tasteless, and odorless, they can be used to intoxicate or sedate unknowing victims to commit sexual assaults, for example.
- **Depressants:** These are drugs used to relieve anxiety, irritability, and tension. There is a high potential for abuse and, when combined with alcohol, effects are heightened and risks are multiplied.
- **Heroin:** Increasingly, new, young users are being lured by inexpensive, high-purity heroin that can be sniffed or smoked instead of injected. Heroin has also been appearing in more affluent communities.
- **Steroids:** Anabolic steroids are a group of powerful compounds closely related to the male sex hormone testosterone. Recently, there has been a significant increase in anabolic steroid abuse among middle-schoolers.

## **Alcoholism and Alcohol Abuse**

### ***The risks of alcohol use***

For most Americans, moderate consumption of alcohol is not harmful. Moderate alcohol is up to two drinks per day for most men and one drink per day for most women and older adults. However, nearly 14 million Americans (1 in every 13 adults) abuse alcohol. Overuse of alcohol can affect memory, distort mental perceptions, affect social relationships or job/school performance, interfere with physical coordination and have adverse effects on many organ systems in the body. Heavy drinking is also associated with increased risk of cancer, liver cirrhosis, heart disease and pancreatitis. And, even moderate consumption of alcohol can cause harm to the drinker and to others. When a pregnant woman drinks alcohol, her developing child may suffer physical damage, referred to as fetal alcohol syndrome. When combined with prescription drugs and over-the-counter medications, the negative effects of moderate or severe drinking can be

intensified. Drinking increases the risk of death from automobile crashes, recreational accidents, on-the-job accidents, homicide and suicide. Alcoholism is an illness, and as such, can be effectively treated.

### **Risk Factors for Alcoholism?**

Alcoholism tends to run in families. Children of alcoholics have a two to four times greater risk of developing alcoholism than children of non-alcoholics. Researchers are currently looking for the genes that may influence drinking and the development of alcoholism. Environmental factors that may influence drinking and the development of alcoholism include influence of friends, stress levels, and ease of obtaining alcohol. Other factors, such as social support, may help protect high-risk people from alcohol problems.

### **What Are the Signs of a Drinking Problem?**

One “yes” response to the following questions suggests an alcohol problem. Make an appointment to see a trained health care provider, who can decide whether there is a problem and determine the best course of action. The “C.A.G.E.” mnemonic below is helpful in determining if there is an alcohol problem:

**C:** Have you ever felt you should Cut down on your drinking?

**A:** Have people Annoyed you by criticizing your drinking?

**G:** Have you ever felt bad or Guilty about your drinking?

**E:** Have you ever had a drink first thing in the morning (an “Eye opener”) to steady your nerves or to get rid of a hangover?

Even if the answers to the above questions are “no,” one should still seek help if he or she experiences drinking-related problems with work, home, health, or the law. The sooner a person gets help, the better the chances for recovery.

**Mental Health America of Franklin County** is a private, not-for-profit organization, established in 1956. We help people navigate the mental health system. We are dedicated to promoting mental health in Franklin County through advocacy, education, and support services. Our programs include: information and referral to community mental health and alcohol/drug services; free support groups for people with mental illness and their families; an Ombudsman program that assists clients in navigating the mental health and alcohol/drug system; mental health screenings in English and Spanish; Pro Bono Counseling Program where underinsured and uninsured individuals can receive free counseling; community and professional mental health education including Get Connected; maternal mental health support and advocacy (POEM); and a quarterly newsletter featuring legislative updates and new happenings at MHAFC. We receive funding from the Franklin County ADAMH Board, United Way of Central Ohio, individuals, foundations, and corporations. To become a member or find out more information, please visit us online at [www.mhafc.org](http://www.mhafc.org).