



Women and Alcohol

Helpful information

This handout provides general information about alcoholism and alcohol's effect on women's bodies.

How many women are affected by alcohol?

- About 5 to 10% of women in the U.S. (5 to 10 out of 100) will be considered alcoholics at some point in their lives.
- Alcohol abuse is growing faster among women than among men.

What women have the highest risk of alcohol abuse and alcoholism?

The highest risk of alcohol abuse and alcoholism is found in women who:

- Have alcoholism in their family
- Are victims of violence as children or adults
- Have partners who are alcoholic
- Have binge-and-purge eating disorders (*bulimia*)
- Are depressed
- Are young, unmarried, and living with a partner
- Are middle-aged and in transition (divorce, retirement, children leaving home)
- Have grief and loss issues

How Alcohol Works on Your Body

- Alcohol depresses your brain and slows down your nervous system.
- Alcohol enters your bloodstream from your stomach. This means its harmful effects reach everywhere in your body.

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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.

Women's Health Care Center:
206-598-5500

- How quickly alcohol gets into your system depends on:
 - How much you drink
 - How fast you drink it
 - How strong the alcohol is
 - If you have food in your stomach
- Some drugs, such as valium or sleeping pills, increase the effects of alcohol.
- Women's bodies do not break down alcohol as well as men's bodies. Problems like liver damage occur more quickly in women, and with less alcohol, compared to men.
- A woman who drinks the same amount as a man will have higher amounts of alcohol in her bloodstream. This is because women have less water in their bodies.

Health Problems that Occur in Women Who Drink

These conditions are seen more often in women who abuse alcohol:

- High blood pressure, which can increase risk of heart attack and stroke
- Enlarged or weak heart
- Hormone imbalance
- Breast cancer
- Stomach ulcers and intestinal bleeding
- Liver disease such as hepatitis, cirrhosis, and pancreatitis
- Malnutrition
- Being overweight
- Bone loss

How much drinking is safe?

- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services advises that if you drink every day, have only 1 drink a day. One drink equals 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine, or 1.5 ounces of hard liquor.
- If you do not drink every day, limit yourself to 2 drinks on the days you do drink.

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