Alcohol Use

Section Summary

- Excess alcohol consumption has been linked to high blood pressure, liver disease, stroke, heart problems, cancer and reduced immune functioning.
- Both high blood pressure and strokes increase the risk of developing dementia.
- Drinking alcohol increases risk of injuries, including traumatic brain injury which increases the risk of dementia.
- Adults aged 45-65 who drink over 21 units of alcohol (~12 drinks) per week are at a 20% greater risk of developing dementia.
- Those with alcohol use disorder are three times more likely to develop early onset dementia.

Activities

Activity One: Circle the Problem

- Screen share, print or draw the organ diagram provided in the “Additional Resources” section of this guide.
- Have participants take turns circling organs/body systems that may be negatively impacted by heavy alcohol consumption.
- Once you have finished circling all the affected organs/body systems, have the group identify the alcohol associated diseases/symptoms linked to it.
  - I.e. The brain and depression.
  - There is a organ diagram, as well as a list provided in the “Additional Resources” section of this guide so you can check your work.
Activity Two: Sober Fun

● As a group create two lists together.
  ○ List A will be a list of social activities that can be done or places that can be visited as an alternative to having a drink or going out to a bar.
    ■ Maybe bowling or going hiking.
  ○ List B will be a list of social activities or places that encourage low risk drinking behaviors (where you can drink but would be likely to stay below the limit).
    ■ Maybe playing a board game that requires focus, like scrubble.

Discussion Questions

● What aspects of our culture encourage drinking?
  ○ For example, consider the role of drinking in movies, TV shows, and advertisements.
● Have you encountered a situation where you think alcohol misuse has negatively impacted an individual’s life?
Additional Resources

Organ Diagram

Associated diseases/symptoms

Brain/Head:
Short term symptoms of alcohol use:
- Slurred speech
- Vision impairment
- Anxiety

Long term/extreme symptoms of alcohol abuse:
- Extreme mood shifts
- Memory lapses
- Brain damage
- Depression
Heart:
Short term symptoms of alcohol use:
- Increased heart rate
- Expanded blood vessels

Long term/extreme symptoms of alcohol abuse:
- Cardiomyopathy (stretching and drooping of the heart muscle)
- Arrhythmias (irregular heartbeat)
- Stroke
- High blood pressure
- Hypertension

Lungs:
Short term symptoms of alcohol use:
- Slowed breathing

Long term/extreme symptoms of alcohol abuse:
- Acute respiratory distress syndrome
- Pneumonia

Liver:
Short term symptoms of alcohol use:
- Liver inflammation

Long term/extreme symptoms of alcohol abuse:
- Fatty liver
- Alcoholic hepatitis
- Fibrosis
- Cirrhosis
- Liver cancer

Pancreas:
Short term symptoms of alcohol use:
- Production of toxic substances

Long term/extreme symptoms of alcohol abuse:
- Pancreatitis

Stomach/Large Intestine/Small Intestine:
Short term symptoms of alcohol use:
- Acid reflux
- Diarrhea

Long term/extreme symptoms of alcohol abuse:
- Gut leakiness
- Microbial dysbiosis
- Colorectal cancer