Alcohol is consumed worldwide mostly during social interactions. It is one of the most commonly used and abused drugs. Alcohol is an addictive drug that may result in the disease known as alcoholism, which can subsequently lead to significant individual and family pain, suffering, and loss.

**What is Alcoholism?**

According to the Mayo Clinic (2015) alcoholism is a chronic and progressive disease. Some of the signs and symptoms of alcoholism include:

* Constant urges or compulsions to drink
* Inability to control drinking even if and when it causes problems such as in relationships, legal, finances and or employment
* Being preoccupied with alcohol
* Alcohol dependence and tolerance thereby needing more drinks to feel similar previous effects
* Withdrawal symptoms such as nausea, sweating and shaking following the decrease or discontinuation of drinking
* Alone drinking and or hiding drinking;
* Forgetfulness commonly referred to as “Black out”
* Keeping alcohol in unlikely places at home, at work, or in car.

**What is a standard alcoholic drink?**

A standard alcoholic drink contains approximately 14 grams of pure alcohol (0.6 ounces) which then translates into approximately:

* 12 ounces of regular beer (about 5 percent alcohol).
* 8 to 9 ounces of malt liquor (about 7 percent alcohol).
* 5 ounces of wine (about 12 percent alcohol).
* 1.5 ounces or a shot of 80-proof hard liquor (about 40 percent alcohol).

**What are the risk factors for alcoholism?**

Several risk factors have been associated with alcoholism. Some of them include:

* Age: Onset of drinking at earlier age increases the risk of problem drinking and alcohol dependence.
* Family history: Having a parent or close relatives who suffer from alcoholism.
* Depression or other mental health issues has been linked to an increase in alcohol consumption.
* Social and Cultural factors: Having friends or a close partner who drinks regularly could increase your risk of alcoholism.

**What are the complications of alcoholism?**

Alcohol is a depressant that acts on the central nervous system. Alcohol consumption results in sedation, loss of inhibitions, changes in thoughts, speech, muscle coordination, behavior, judgment and emotions. Excessive drinking is usually associated with domestic problems, decreased performance at school and at work, motor vehicle accidents, and increased likelihood of engaging in violent activities and/or risky activities

Other more serious health problems that may result from excessive drinking include:

* Liver disease: Heavy drinking can cause inflammation of the liver called alcoholic hepatitis, which then if continues can lead to cirrhosis, which is an irreversible destruction and scarring of the liver.
* Heart Problems: Excessive long term drinking can cause alcoholic cardiomyopathy. Cardiomyopathy is a disease that causes the heart to enlarge, leading to heart failure and or stroke.
* Digestive problems: Heavy drinking can cause inflammation of the pancreas (pancreatitis) and the stomach lining (gastritis). It can cause both stomach and esophageal ulcers. It can also diminish absorption of B vitamins and other important nutrients.
* Sexual dysfunction: Excessive drinking can lead to erectile dysfunction in men and menstrual complications in women.
* Birth defects: Drinking while pregnant is especially dangerous. A pregnant woman is never drinking alone. No amount of drinking is safe during pregnancy. Alcohol use during pregnancy may cause fetal alcohol syndrome, resulting in a child born with physical and developmental problems lasting a lifetime.
* Increased risk of cancer: Long-term excessive alcohol use has been linked to a higher risk of many cancers, including mouth, throat, liver, colon and breast cancer. Scientific evidence has shown that even moderate drinking can increase the risk of breast cancer.

**When to see a doctor?**

Consult your physician if or when you notice:

* Craving: A strong need, or urge, to drink.
* Loss of Control: Not being able to stop drinking once drinking has begun.
* Physical Dependence: Withdrawal symptoms, such as nausea, sweating, shakiness, and anxiety after stopping drinking.
* Tolerance: The need to drink greater amounts of alcohol to get “high”.
* Denial: You do not think you have a drinking problem, but family members have expressed concerns about your drinking.

Along with other important information, a blood screening can help determine the health of your liver and kidneys, which can be affected by alcohol consumption. The Health Department is having a blood screening on Tuesday, April 19th from 8am-10am. Please call 973.680.4058 for more information.

**To Learn More**

Contact the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc. for information, publications, help and or concerns about alcoholism.

<http://ncadd.org/>

HOPE LINE: 800 NCACALL (24 hour Affiliate referral)

Article Information Taken from:

Alcoholism – [Mayo Clinic](http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/alcoholism/basics/definition/con-20020866)

[National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc.](https://www.ncadd.org/)