

Binge Drinking

Imagine for a moment how much more enjoyable and productive life might be if excessive drinking was eliminated from your life.

Having 4-5 drinks within a two hour time span is **BINGE DRINKING** and it can be deadly.

One in six Americans drinks to excess, or binge drinks, at least four times per month. Binge drinking occurs when an individual's drinking pattern causes their blood alcohol concentration (BAC) to be 0.08 percent or higher. In common terms, this equates to roughly five drinks for a man and four drinks for a woman within a two-hour span.

THE DAMAGE OF BINGE DRINKING

It's no secret that excessive alcohol can negatively impact our lives. Drinking alcohol can affect our physical, emotional, and mental health. It can alter our sense of balance, decision-making abilities, memory and a variety of other brain and

body functions, and is often associated with social and relational consequences such as car accidents, domestic violence, sexually transmitted diseases, and unintended pregnancies. The short-term physical effects of binge drinking include nausea, hangovers, memory loss, alcohol poisoning, and personal injury. Long-term potential consequences can include brain or liver damage, high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, depression, cancer, and relational and work problems.

IDENTIFYING BINGE DRINKING HABITS

The downward spiral of binge drinking doesn't happen overnight. Over time, the excessive alcohol consumption changes your brain's chemical balance and nerve tracks associated with the experience of pleasure and judgment. The ability to exercise control over your behavior becomes severely distorted. These chemical changes cause you to crave alcohol to feel good or alleviate negative emotions.

There are several questions to signal if you or a loved one is struggling with binge drinking. Answering yes to one or more of these questions might be a warning sign to seek help.

- (Y) (N) Do you wrestle with guilt about drinking too much?
- (Y) (N) Do you ever have four or more drinks in one day?
- (Y) (N) Do you forget conversations or

events that happened while you were drinking?

- (Y) (N) Does drinking come before other responsibilities?

ACTION STEPS

Making the choice to reduce or eliminate drinking is a powerful step. The following tips will help you navigate through the process:

- ✓ Take an honest inventory of your life, how much you drink and the consequences.
- ✓ Take a look at where and when you binge drink and consider avoiding these situations.
- ✓ Intersperse non-alcoholic beverages like soda or quinine water.
- ✓ Talk with your health care providers about treatment options.
- ✓ Seek out individual counseling or support groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous.

KEEP IN MIND

There are numerous benefits to reducing your alcohol consumption. Most importantly, changing excessive drinking habits allows you to once again take control of your life. You're not alone, and help is available. Consider reaching out to your health care provider and engaging other counseling resources for guidance on next steps.

What steps will you take today to be well and live life more fully?