

Mental Health Matters in the Workplace!



Alcohol Abuse Among the Workforce

What is an Alcohol Problem?

Missing a day of work due to a hangover is an alcohol problem. Accidents in which drinking is a factor are alcohol problems. Alcoholism is an alcohol problem. A substance that gives pleasure to most people also kills 100,000 Americans annually, causes serious injury, harms youth, destroys families and plays a significant role in violent crime. Some 20-40 percent of patients in large urban hospitals are there because their drinking has caused or contributed to the illness for which they were admitted. The estimated economic cost of alcohol problems in the U.S. was \$185 billion in 1998, \$683 each year for every man, woman and child.

Nearly one in five men and one in ten women who visit their primary care providers have problems with alcohol. According to a recent government survey, 6 percent of the adult population drinks heavily, meaning that they drank five or more drinks on the same occasion on at least five different days in the last 30 days.

Problem drinking is using alcohol in ways that are harmful to the drinker or to others. People who are problem drinkers may have the disease of alcoholism or may drink in ways that lead to health or safety problems for themselves or to others.

“20 percent of workers say they have been injured, had to cover for a coworker, or needed to work harder because of other employees' drinking.”

~ Alcohol Cost Calculator for Business
George Washington University Medical Center

“Alcohol problems affect both blue collar workers and white collar workers”

~ Ensuring Solutions.com.

Professions with Greatest Alcohol Abuse Rates

Industrial Field	% Problem Drinkers
1. Construction & Mining	13.0
2. Wholesale Trade	10.0
3. Professional	9.0
4. Finance & Real Estate:	8.0
5. Information & Communications:	8.0
6. <u>U.S. Average:</u>	<u>8.0**</u>
7. Retail:	8.0
8. Manufacturing:	7.0
9. Education, Health & Social Svcs:	5.0

% of employees per 100 employees. For companies employing more than 100 people, divide total employees by 100 and multiply by number above. Example: ABC Construction has 1000 employees. $10 \times 13 = 130$ employees with problem drinking

What is Alcohol Dependence or Alcoholism?

Alcoholism, also known as alcohol dependence or alcohol addiction, is a chronic disease with four primary symptoms:

- ***Craving:*** A strong need or compulsion to drink.
- ***Loss of control:*** The inability to limit one's drinking on any given occasion.
- ***Physical dependence:*** Withdrawal symptoms, such as nausea, sweating, shakiness, and anxiety occur when alcohol use is stopped after a period of heavy drinking.
- ***Tolerance:*** The need to drink greater amounts of alcohol over time in order to get high.

What is Alcohol Abuse?

During the course of a year, a person who meets diagnostic criteria of alcohol abuse will experience at least one of the following drinking-related problems:

- Inability to fulfill major work, school or home responsibilities;
- Drinking in situations that are physically dangerous, such as while driving a car or operating machinery;
- Having recurring alcohol-related legal problems, such as being arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol or for physically hurting someone while drunk; or
- Continuing to drink despite having ongoing relationship problems that are caused or worsened by the drinking.

There is, however a broader spectrum of alcohol-related drinking patterns that can cause grave problems for individuals, families, employers, and communities. Experts now understand that people can drink in a wide range of unhealthy and unsafe ways — from occasionally having as little as a single drink and then driving to being addicted to alcohol — and that unsafe drinking takes a toll in the workforce and at home.

Heavy Drinking & Binge Drinking

Government surveys characterize heavy drinking as having five or more drinks on at least five occasions during a month, but it is important to remember that alcohol problems can and do occur at much lower levels of consumption. Drinking five or more drinks on at least one occasion during a month is considered binge drinking. When heavy drinkers consume five or more drinks on a single occasion, they are bingeing, but not everyone who binges is a heavy drinker. Binge drinking puts individuals at serious risk for an alcohol problem.

Untreated Alcohol Problems Threaten the Lives of Employees & Families

When left untreated, alcohol problems among employees increase absenteeism, reduce productivity and make it more difficult for coworkers to do their jobs. Untreated alcohol problems also increase health care costs among employees and their family members. Those with alcohol problems are more likely to experience problems related to their drinking, including being more likely to have a serious problem with another drug, a serious mental illness or more likely to smoke.

For More Information:

Contact the Mental Health Association of East Tennessee at 865-584-9125.

The Mental Health Association offers equally all services to eligible persons regardless of race, color, national origin or disability.

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