



The Happy Alcoholic Still Creates Problems

There is a myth that suggests a person's excessive drinking is not consequential to him or herself or those around them, if they remain in good mood.

In reality, excessive alcohol consumption can be very harmful to self and others, regardless of one's mood or attitude towards the drinking.

Categories of alcohol consumption include light, moderate, heavy, abusive, and binge. These categories are differentiated by quantity of standard alcoholic beverages consumed and pattern of consumption. While some persons may believe that beer is less consequential than wine and that both are less consequential than liquor, this is but another myth. A beer yields the same alcohol equivalent as 4 ounces of wine and the same alcohol equivalent as an ounce of liquor. Hence it really doesn't matter what form the alcohol comes in, just the number of standardized beverages.

By definition for men, approximately 6 standard alcoholic beverages per week is categorized as light drinking, 12-14 as moderate, 24-26 as heavy and 36 or more as abusive. Rates for women are calculated as being about 2/3's that of men. Furthermore, abusive drinking infers that that level of consumption places the drinker at a high likelihood of contracting an alcohol related physical disorder, such as liver disease, diabetes and Korsakov's syndrome. It is noteworthy that any level of regular drinking increases the risk of these and other associated diseases, but that the more alcohol consumed on a regular basis, the greater the risk.

Binge drinking is defined as five or more standard alcoholic beverages at least once per month on a monthly or so basis. The risks associated with binge drinking are injury and death, the result of misadventure, accident/poor judgement, loss of consciousness, falls and violence.

In terms of impact on self and others, reaching criteria for any level of drinking increases the risk of academic, vocational, social, familial or marital problems. Further, children of parents who consume alcohol to the point of reaching criteria for any level are at risk of social and school related problems during their childhood as well

as social, vocational, marital and parenting problems in their adulthood.

It does not matter if the regular drinker is of good or poor mood, the result of their consumption, only that they reached criteria for being categorized as a regular drinker at any level. Drinking, in and of itself increases risk of poor outcomes for self and others.

Hence, when adult children of alcoholic parents enter counselling for marital, social or vocational problems, they may have a very difficult time understanding the relationship between their parent's drinking and current issues. Further, parents who bring their children to counselling for social or academic problems may resist and have difficulty believing or accepting that parental alcohol consumption is a contributing factor to their child's problems.

At the very least, regular alcohol consumption by a parent is time away from relating with the children and provides a role model of acceptability for regular alcohol consumption. This role model is often the jumping off point for the child-come-teen's alcohol consumption and not a marker of the limit of consumption. Hence teens of parents who consume alcohol on a regular basis are at risk of greater consumption and alcohol related problems. Family members of even the happy alcoholic will worry about their drinking and driving, health problems, finances, vocational stability and relationship issues.

If you are facing difficulties with your child, or you are an adult facing difficulties in your life now, take a look at alcohol consumption patterns in your family. If there is a happy or unhappy alcoholic, chances are that is contributing to the problem and this needs to be explored and addressed.

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