

Auburn University Healthy Tigers Program
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Pharm Phacts: Alcohol Awareness Month

Why is Alcohol Awareness Important?

Special points of interest:

- Alcohol is the most commonly used drug in North America
- Alcoholism is a disease that affect both physical and mental health
- Alcohol is involved in over 30% of traffic deaths
- Alcohol interacts with many medications
- Read more inside...

April is **Alcohol Awareness Month**. This issue of Pharm Phacts will focus on alcoholism and responsible use of alcohol. More than half of adults in North America drink alcohol regularly, making alcohol the most commonly used drug on the continent.¹ While many adults drink responsibly, irresponsible drinking can lead to long term health problems and dangerous accidents. In 2005, there were over 1 million alcohol-related hospitalizations in the United States alone.

Abuse of alcohol is a common problem on college campuses around the country. Anyone who has enjoyed a football game on

“The Plains” can attest to the fact that people of all ages enjoy alcoholic beverages at tailgates all over campus. Even though binge drinking is usually associated with college students, around 70% of binge drinking episodes occur in adults above the normal college age.¹

While the game day atmosphere in Auburn may be enjoyable for most fans, it is important to enjoy yourself responsibly.

The fact is that regular excessive alcohol consumption can lead to health problems.¹ Many types of cancer and liver disease are attributable to alcohol consumption. Mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and suicide



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have been linked with drinking alcohol. Finally, excessive alcohol is associated with neurological and cardiovascular disease. Inside this issue of Pharm Phacts, we will look at other reasons to drink responsibly and find ways to get help.

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What is Alcoholism?

Alcoholism is a disease that involves drinking alcohol habitually.² By definition, alcoholism is characterized by interference with social or work behavior and also health, both physical and mental. Alcohol can reduce anxiety, guilt, and inhibition which can lead to

psychological dependence.

How can you tell if you or someone you love suffers from alcoholism? Here are a few of the most common signs. Having high “alcohol tolerance” may actually be an early sign of alcoholism.²

Drinking alone, denying that your drinking is a problem, and attempting to hide the amount of alcohol you drink may also be signs of alcoholism. If you see any of these signs in yourself or others, it may be time to get help.

Dangers of Drinking Alcohol and Driving

Alcohol is known to reduce alertness and perception.³ Drinking too much can also impair judgment, decrease motor coordination and even cause loss of consciousness. Knowing these effects, there is no mystery as to why driving a car is dangerous after drinking.

Despite strict laws and severe punishment for driving while intoxicated, there were over 100 million reported incidences of

drunk driving in 2010. It is not surprising that alcohol is involved in over 30% of traffic related deaths. If you choose to drink, you can avoid traffic instances by taking the proper precautions.

If you choose to drink, make sure you have arranged for a ride home. Whether you call a friend or call a cab, this option is much safer and less expensive than dealing with a potential DUI. If

you have a friend who has been drinking, take their keys away. Finally, designating a driver is a great way to save money and prevent drinking and driving. If you are a host, encourage designated drivers by offering drinks that do not contain alcohol. By taking these actions, you can make a difference and prevent driving while impaired.



Taxi services in Auburn:
Tiger Taxi: 444-4444
Eagle Town Taxi: 524-9164
Twin City Taxi: 888-354-5124

Alcohol Interacting with Medication

Do you take any prescription medications? What about non-prescription items? If you answered yes to either of these, then alcohol may interact with something that you take regularly. In fact, there are many medications that may cause problems if taken with alcohol.

Severe interactions occur with the antibiotic Flagyl® (metronidazole), MAOIs

(selegiline and rasagiline), and other similar medications.⁴ There are also interactions if alcohol is used with other antidepressants, antipsychotics, and antiepileptic drugs (AEDs). Both prescription and nonprescription pain medications interact with alcohol. Even Tylenol®, when taken with alcohol, may cause damage to the liver. Benzodiazepines and barbiturates, when taken with

alcohol, may cause increased cognitive impairment. Finally, alcohol may increase the bleeding risk of blood thinning medications like warfarin.

This is a brief list of drugs that interact with alcohol. If you take prescription medications, ask your doctor or pharmacist before drinking alcoholic beverages, as this behavior may not be safe.

“There are many medications that may cause problems if taken with alcohol.”

Are there Benefits of Drinking Alcohol?

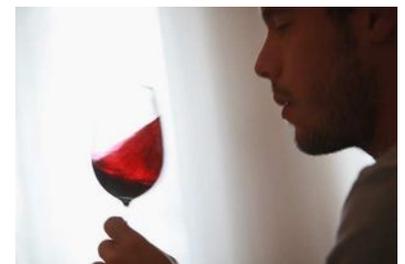
So far, we have seen risks associated with drinking alcohol, but are there any benefits of drinking alcohol? A 2010 meta-analysis demonstrated that moderate alcohol consumption reduced the risk of heart disease in both men and women of all ages.⁵ But how much is moderate consumption?

This study found that women

who consumed up to 60 grams/day, or about 4 drinks, had a reduced risk of heart disease compared to women who abstain from alcohol.⁵ The same study found that men who consume up to 90 grams/day, or about 6 drinks, had lower heart disease risk.

This study pooled results from

five other studies. While the risk reduction was significant, keep in mind the other risks associated with alcohol consumption. Consider risk of other health conditions and also dangers of using alcohol regularly. While alcohol reduces the risk of heart disease, the benefit may not outweigh the risk of drinking alcohol.



While moderate alcohol consumption may reduce heart disease risk, there are certainly dangers associated with drinking alcohol.

Where can I Find Help?

There are a few places to find help with alcohol abuse and addiction. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist, and ask if any of these medications are good options for you.

Antabuse® (disulfiram) is used for the management of alcoholism.⁴ People who drink while taking this drug will experience symptoms including headache, nausea, vomiting, sweating, blurred vision, and many other severe symptoms to discourage alcohol use. These reactions can even occur up to two weeks after stopping the drug.⁶

Campral® (acamprosate calcium) is used to help people abstain from alcohol use.⁴ It actually helps relieve anxiety and sleeplessness that occurs with alcohol withdrawal. People would normally try to drink in order to relieve these symptoms, but with Campral, this is not necessary as symptoms are less severe.

Vivitrol® (naltrexone) is used for alcohol dependence.⁶ Exactly how this drug works is not known, but it is believed to decrease the “reward” feeling associated with drinking alcohol.⁴

Topamax® (topiramate) is a drug that is used to reduced alcohol cravings.⁴ This may work by stimulating the same area of the brain as alcohol would, therefore the craving goes away.⁶

Librium® (chlordiazepoxide) is another medication that helps relieve alcohol withdrawal.⁶ This drug is a benzodiazepine that help reduce anxiety and sleeplessness in patients suffering from alcohol withdrawal. Other medications may be used as well. Ask your doctor if any of these are right for you.

Finally, there are support groups all over the country to help with alcohol abuse and addic-

tion, like Alcoholics Anonymous. Some of these meet right here in Auburn. Meeting times are available in various locations almost every day. These meetings are for people who want to stop drinking or just want to learn more about alcoholism.



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