Health Reference Series

Fifth Edition

Alcoholism

SOURCEBOOK

Basic Consumer Health Information about Alcohol Use, Abuse, and Addiction, Including Facts about the Physical Consequences of Alcohol Abuse, Such as Brain Changes and Problems with Cognitive Functioning, Cirrhosis and Other Liver Diseases, Cardiovascular Disease, Pancreatitis, and Alcoholic Neuropathy, and the Effects of Alcohol on Reproductive Health and Fetal Development, Mental Health Problems Associated with Alcohol Abuse, and Alcohol's Impact on Families, Workplaces, and the Community

Along with Information about Underage Drinking, Alcohol Treatment and Recovery, a Glossary of Related Terms, and Directories of Resources for More Information

Chapter 6

Facts about Alcoholism

Alcohol Use in the United States

- **Prevalence of Drinking:** According to the 2015 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), 86.4 percent of people ages 18 or older reported that they drank alcohol at some point in their lifetime; 70.1 percent reported that they drank in the past year; 56 percent reported that they drank in the past month.

- **Prevalence of Binge Drinking and Heavy Alcohol Use:** In 2015, 26.9 percent of people ages 18 or older reported that they engaged in binge drinking in the past month; 7 percent reported that they engaged in heavy alcohol use in the past month.

Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD) in the United States

- **Adults (ages 18+):** According to the 2015 NSDUH, 15.1 million adults ages 18 and older (6.2% of this age group) had AUD. This includes 9.8 million men (8.4% of men in this age group) and 5.3 million women (4.2% of women in this age group).

    - About 6.7 percent of adults who had AUD in the past year received treatment. This includes 7.4 percent of males and 5.4 percent of females with AUD in this age group.

- **Youth (ages 12–17):** According to the 2015 NSDUH, an estimated 623,000 adolescents ages 12–17 (2.5% of this age group) had AUD. This number includes 298,000 males (2.3% of males in this age group) and 325,000 females (2.7% of females in this age group).

- About 5.2 percent of youth who had AUD in the past year received treatment. This includes 5.1 percent of males and 5.3 percent of females with AUD in this age group.

Alcohol-Related Deaths

- An estimated 88,000 people (approximately 62,000 men and 26,000 women) die from alcohol-related causes annually, making alcohol the third leading preventable cause of death in the United States. The first is tobacco, and the second is poor diet and physical inactivity.

- In 2014, alcohol-impaired driving fatalities accounted for 9,967 deaths (31 percent of overall driving fatalities).

Economic Burden

- In 2010, alcohol misuse cost the United States $249.0 billion.

- Three quarters of the total cost of alcohol misuse is related to binge drinking.

Global Burden

- In 2012, 3.3 million deaths, or 5.9 percent of all global deaths (7.6% for men and 4% for women), were attributable to alcohol consumption.

- In 2014, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported that alcohol contributed to more than 200 diseases and injury-related health conditions, most notably *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV)* alcohol dependence, liver cirrhosis, cancers, and injuries. In 2012, 5.1 percent of the burden of disease and injury worldwide (139 million disability adjusted life-years) was attributable to alcohol consumption.

- Globally, alcohol misuse was the fifth leading risk factor for premature death and disability in 2010. Among people between the ages of 15 and 49, it is the first. In the age group 20–39 years, approximately 25 percent of the total deaths are alcohol attributable.

Family Consequences

- More than 10 percent of U.S. children live with a parent with alcohol problems, according to a 2012 study.

Underage Drinking

Prevalence of Underage Alcohol Use

- **Prevalence of Drinking:** According to the 2015 NSDUH, 33.1% of 15-year-olds report that they have had at least 1 drink in their lives. About 7.7 million people ages 12–20 (20.3% of this age group) reported drinking alcohol in the past month (19.8% of males and 20.8% of females).

- **Prevalence of Binge Drinking:** According to the 2015 NSDUH, approximately 5.1 million people (about 13.4%) ages 12–20 (13.4% of males and 13.3% of females) reported binge drinking in the past month.

- **Prevalence of Heavy Alcohol Use:** According to the 2015 NSDUH, approximately 1.3 million people (about 3.3%) ages 12–20 (3.6% of males and 3% of females) reported heavy alcohol use in the past month.

Consequences of Underage Alcohol Use

- Research indicates that alcohol use during the teenage years could interfere with normal adolescent brain development and increase the risk of developing AUD. In addition, underage drinking contributes to a range of acute consequences, including injuries, sexual assaults, and even deaths—including those from car crashes.

Alcohol and College Students

Prevalence of Alcohol Use

- **Prevalence of Drinking:** According to the 2015 NSDUH, 58 percent of full-time college students ages 18–22 drank alcohol in the past month compared with 48.2 percent of other persons of the same age.

- **Prevalence of Binge Drinking:** According to the 2015 NSDUH, 37.9 percent of college students ages 18–22 reported

binge drinking in the past month compared with 32.6 percent of other persons of the same age.

- **Prevalence of Heavy Alcohol Use:** According to the 2015 NSDUH, 12.5 percent of college students ages 18–22 reported heavy alcohol use in the past month compared with 8.5 percent of other persons of the same age.

Consequences—Researchers estimate that each year:

- 1,825 college students between the ages of 18 and 24 die from alcohol-related unintentional injuries, including motor-vehicle crashes.

- 696,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 are assaulted by another student who has been drinking.

- 97,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 report experiencing alcohol-related sexual assault or date rape.

- Roughly 20 percent of college students meet the criteria for AUD.

- About 1 in 4 college students report academic consequences from drinking, including missing class, falling behind in class, doing poorly on exams or papers, and receiving lower grades overall.

Alcohol and Pregnancy

- The prevalence of fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) in the United States was estimated by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) in 1996 to be between 0.5 and 3.0 cases per 1,000.

- More reports from specific U.S. sites report the prevalence of FAS to be 2–7 cases per 1,000, and the prevalence of fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASDs) to be as high as 20–50 cases per 1,000.

Alcohol and the Human Body

- In 2015, of the 78,529 liver disease deaths among individuals ages 12 and older, 47 percent involved alcohol. Among males, 49,695 liver disease deaths occurred and 49.5 percent involved alcohol. Among females, 28,834 liver disease deaths occurred and 43.5 percent involved alcohol.

- Among all cirrhosis deaths in 2013, 47.9 percent were alcohol related. The proportion of alcohol-related cirrhosis was highest (76.5%) among deaths of persons ages 25–34, followed by deaths of persons ages 35–44, at 70 percent.

- In 2009, alcohol-related liver disease was the primary cause of almost 1 in 3 liver transplants in the United States.

- Drinking alcohol increases the risk of cancers of the mouth, esophagus, pharynx, larynx, liver, and breast.

Health Benefits of Moderate Alcohol Consumption

- Moderate alcohol consumption, according to the *2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* (DGA), is up to 1 drink per day for women and up to 2 drinks per day for men.

- Moderate alcohol consumption may have beneficial effects on health. These include decreased risk for heart disease and mortality due to heart disease, decreased risk of ischemic stroke (in which the arteries to the brain become narrowed or blocked, resulting in reduced blood flow), and decreased risk of diabetes.

- In most Western countries where chronic diseases such as coronary heart disease (CHD), cancer, stroke, and diabetes are the primary causes of death, results from large epidemiological studies consistently show that alcohol reduces mortality, especially among middle aged and older men and women—an association that is likely due to the protective effects of moderate alcohol consumption on CHD, diabetes, and ischemic stroke.

- It is estimated that 26,000 deaths were averted in 2005 because of reductions in ischemic heart disease, ischemic stroke, and diabetes from the benefits attributed to moderate alcohol consumption.

- Expanding our understanding of the relationship between moderate alcohol consumption and potential health benefits remains a challenge, and, although there are positive effects, alcohol may not benefit everyone who drinks moderately.