

Alcoholism: How it Affects Your Health

You may enjoy a beer or a glass of wine occasionally, but if you are drinking to the point where it disrupts your day-to-day life you may have Alcohol use disorder or Alcoholism.

Alcohol use disorder is a chronic disease, which means it is long-term. It occurs when you drink so much that your body eventually becomes addicted to alcohol. Alcohol affects your entire body. After you take a drink, the alcohol travels through your stomach and digestive tract to your liver. Your liver can only absorb small amounts of alcohol at a time. The rest goes into your bloodstream, traveling through your body and affecting every organ it meets.

In the brain, alcohol causes the release of feel-good chemicals that lower your inhibitions and interfere with your brain chemistry. The long-term health risks of Alcohol Use Disorder include chronic diseases such as: liver disease, pancreatitis, high blood pressure, stroke, cancers including liver, mouth, esophagus, breast and throat, depression and anxiety, a weakened immune system.

You can also experience short-term risks to your health including: blackouts, increased risk of accidents, an increased risk of violence, risky sexual behavior, and alcohol poisoning.

Alcohol use disorder includes binge drinking and heavy drinking. Binge drinking means five or more drinks at one time for men and four or more drinks for women. Heavy drinking means 14 or more drinks a week for men and 7 or more drinks a week for women.

A standard drink is: 12 ounces of beer; 5 ounces of wine; 1.5 ounces of hard liquor.

If you are concerned you or a loved one drinks too much, call your doctor. Have an honest conversation about your alcohol use and take the next steps to get the treatment you need.