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# M E S S E N G E R

INVEST EAP



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## Supporting a Healthy Organization

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### ALCOHOL and DRUG AWARENESS

Recreational drinking is an often-unquestioned societal norm. To celebrate an accomplishment, champagne is a time-honored indulgence. At parties, weddings, and holiday meals the standard method of tribute is the giving of a toast and the raising of a glass. Throughout film and television, the day seems to officially end when a character is able to stop by a neighborhood bar, or pour a glass of wine at home. And while the thread of drinking is well woven into American culture, it is important to take a step back and think about the pros and cons of alcohol and the ways we use it.

Recreational “drugging”, on the other hand, is a far less accepted practice, given the illicit nature of many drugs, plus the fact that prescription medication is never intended for use *other* than therapeutic while under the direction of a physician, nurse practitioner or other official licensed healthcare provider.

In contemplating these two substances, alcohol and drugs, there is a very tricky line to walk between what is legal, what is not, what is appropriate use, and what is abuse.

Both alcohol and drug use have the potential to alter mood, judgment, capacity, and actions. The boundary between enjoying a relaxed state (in the case of alcohol used responsibly by legal adults) or having pain or other symptoms managed (in the case of legal, appropriately used over-the-counter or prescription drugs) can easily blur into inappropriate use or dependence, given the addictive nature of many substances.

Inappropriate use or dependence has

serious and potentially life threatening implications, as well as the power to wreak havoc on professional and personal life.

#### AVOIDING PROBLEMS WITH ALCOHOL

In order to establish and maintain a healthy relationship with alcohol and other substances, consider the following information provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

##### How do I know if it's okay to drink?

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the current *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommend that if you choose to drink alcoholic beverages, do not exceed 1 drink per day for women or 2 drinks per day for men. According to the guidelines, people who should not drink alcoholic beverages at all include the following:

- Children and adolescents.
- Individuals of any age who cannot limit their drinking to a low level.
- Women who may become pregnant or who are pregnant.
- Individuals who plan to drive, operate machinery, or take part in other activities that require attention, skill, or coordination.
- Individuals taking prescription

or over-the-counter medications that can interact with alcohol.

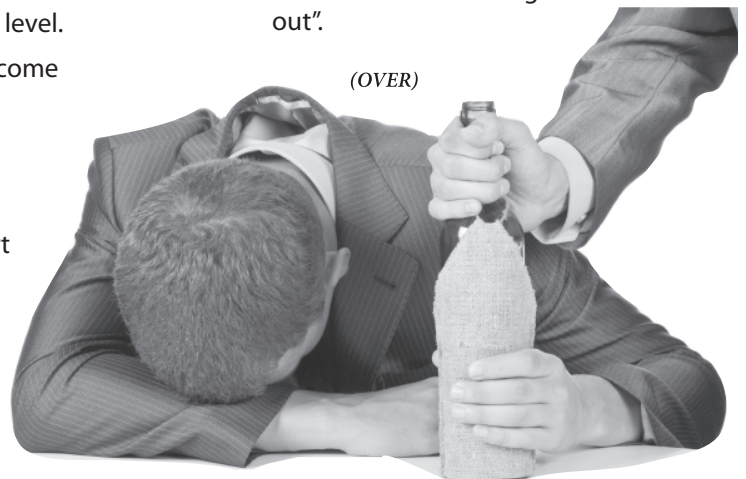
- Individuals with certain medical conditions.
- Persons recovering from alcoholism.

##### What is the difference between alcoholism and alcohol abuse?

Dependence on alcohol (*alcoholism*) is a chronic disease. Some signs and symptoms of alcohol dependence include:

- A strong craving for alcohol.
- Continued use despite repeated physical, psychological, or interpersonal problems.
- The inability to limit drinking.
- Tolerance to alcohol so that you need more to feel its effects.
- Drinking alone / hiding your drinking
- Physical withdrawal symptoms — such as nausea, sweating and shaking — when you don't drink.
- Not remembering conversations or commitments, sometimes referred to as “blacking out”.

(OVER)



- Keeping alcohol in unlikely places at home, at work or in your car.

**Alcohol abuse** is a pattern of drinking that results in harm to one's health, interpersonal relationships, or ability to work. Manifestations of alcohol abuse include the following:

- Failure to fulfill major responsibilities at work, school, or home.
- Drinking in dangerous situations, such as while driving or operating machinery.
- Legal problems related to alcohol, such as being arrested for drinking while driving or for physically hurting someone while drunk.
- Continued drinking despite ongoing relationship problems that are caused or worsened by drinking.
- Long-term alcohol abuse can turn into alcohol dependence.

According to the Mayo Clinic, **risk factors for alcohol abuse and alcoholism** include:

- **Steady drinking over time.** Drinking too much on a regular basis for an extended period or binge drinking on a regular basis can produce a physical dependence on alcohol.
- **Age.** People who begin drinking at an early age are at a higher risk of problem drinking or physical dependence on alcohol.
- **Family history.** The risk of alcoholism is higher for people who have a parent or other close relatives who have problems with alcohol.
- **Depression and other mental health problems.** It's common for people with a mental health disorder such as anxiety, depression or bipolar disorder to have problems with alcohol or other substances.
- **Social and cultural factors.** Having friends or a close partner who drinks regularly could increase your risk of alcoholism. The glamorous way that drinking is sometimes portrayed in the media also may send the message that it's OK to drink too much.

- **Mixing medication and alcohol.** Some medications interact with alcohol, increasing its toxic effects. Drinking while taking these medications can either increase or decrease their effectiveness, or even make them dangerous.

## AVOIDING SUBSTANCE USE, MISUSE, AND ABUSE

Given that many drugs are illegal, and prescription drugs are to be used according to the instruction of a medical professional, it is generally more straightforward to draw lines around appropriate substance use.

**Illegal drugs** should be avoided for many reasons, primarily due to risks to health, wellbeing, and safety of self and others, and the criminal and financial penalties that apply.

**Prescription drugs** should be taken as prescribed under the care and oversight of the prescribing professional, and over-the-counter medications should be used only after clear review of labels and in consultation with a primary care provider to ensure there are no contraindications for use.

**Ingestion or inhalation of any alternately intended substance** for the purpose of achieving a high carries tremendous risks. Parents in particular should familiarize themselves with the potential for children to explore risky behavior such as "huffing" and store chemicals, cleaning products and inhalants safely.

According to the Mayo Clinic, **risk factors for substance misuse and abuse** can include:

- **Family history of addiction.** Drug addiction is more common in some families and likely involves genetic predisposition. If you have a blood relative, such as a parent or sibling, with alcohol or drug problems, you're at greater risk of developing a drug addiction.
- **Being male.** Men are more likely to have problems with drugs than women

are. However, progression of addictive disorders is known to be faster in females.

- **Having another mental health disorder.** If you have a mental health disorder such as depression, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or post-traumatic stress disorder, you're more likely to become dependent on drugs.
- **Peer pressure.** Peer pressure is a strong factor in starting to use and abuse drugs, particularly for young people.
- **Lack of family involvement.** Difficult family situations or lack of a bond with your parents or siblings may increase the risk of addiction, as can a lack of parental supervision.
- **Anxiety, depression and loneliness.** Using drugs can become a way of coping with these painful psychological feelings and can make these problems even worse.
- **Taking a highly addictive drug.** Some drugs, such as stimulants, cocaine or painkillers, may result in faster development of addiction than other drugs. However, taking drugs considered less addicting — so-called "light drugs" — can start you on a pathway of drug use and addiction.

### How to get help

If you have concerns about your own or a family member's alcohol or drug use, begin by talking to EAP or your primary care provider.

For any medical issues or emergencies related to substance abuse, please call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room.

## RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

<http://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/faqs.htm#standDrink>

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/drug-addiction/basics/definition/con-20020970>



## EAP SERVICES

EAP is here to help. For more information about articles in this newsletter, or any other EAP-related topic, please call one of our trained counselors at our toll-free number:

**888-834-2830 • [www.investeap.org](http://www.investeap.org)**