

# Is My Drinking a Problem? **ETR** Associates

## Is my drinking a problem?

Many people enjoy a drink now and then. People drink for different reasons:

- To celebrate special occasions
- To enjoy the taste with a good meal
- To feel more at ease at parties

Some people drink alcohol moderately without having problems. Other people find they have problems when they drink. What's the difference?

A lot depends on the way a person drinks. These checklists can help you decide if you, or someone you know, has a drinking problem and show you steps to take to get help.

## Do you drink moderately?

People who drink moderately don't have to drink to have fun. They know how much is enough and don't drink more than that. There are times when they don't drink, even when others are drinking.

### When you choose to drink, do you:

- Know your limits and keep track of how much you're drinking?
- Refuse a drink if you don't know what's in it?
- Eat before and while you're drinking?
- Space and pace your drinks?
- Alternate between alcoholic and nonalcoholic beverages?
- Avoid other drugs when you drink?

### Do you choose not to drink when:

- You'll be driving?
- You're upset, anxious or angry?
- You really don't want to drink?
- You might need to make a decision about sex?
- You're pregnant, or think you might be?
- You're taking certain medications, or using other drugs?

If you answered yes to these questions, chances are good that you drink moderately.



"A good friend helped me admit that my drinking wasn't normal."

## What is problem drinking?

People might not think they have problems. For example:

- After a bad day, they quickly drink 4 or 5 beers. By the fifth beer they feel better—for the moment.
- A week later, they go out with friends for a few pitchers and end up getting drunk. They think they had a good time—until the next morning.
- Four days later, they're nervous about a blind date. So they have a couple of drinks before they go, followed by wine at the restaurant. Things seem great! Until they get stopped for driving under the influence.

It's possible to drink too much once in a while and not have a problem. But it helps to notice early warning signs.

## What is binge drinking?

Drinking a lot in a short amount of time to get in a "party" mood, or to get drunk, is called binge drinking. Someone who has 4 or 5 drinks in 2 hours, for example, one or more times in a 2 week period, is probably a binge drinker.

People who binge drink may think they don't have a drinking problem because they don't drink regularly. But a person doesn't have to drink every day to have a drinking problem. Frequent binge drinking can lead to long-term problems.

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## Could you have a problem?

Use these questions to help you think about how you drink.

### Do you:

- Drink 4, 5 or more drinks in a row on a single occasion?
- Binge drink 2 or more times a month?
- Need to drink to have fun?
- Often have a few drinks when things get tough?
- Do or say things you wouldn't ordinarily do or say after having a drink or two?
- Refuse to stop drinking when asked?
- Talk with friends a lot about drinking and getting drunk?
- Have a hangover 2 or 3 times a month?

These are early warning signs that you could have a drinking problem.

## If you can't stop

Sometimes people can't stop drinking or refuse to admit there's a problem. Answer these questions to see if you could be in trouble. **Do you:**

- Do embarrassing or harmful things when you drink?
- Forget things that happened when you were drinking?
- Argue, fight or upset friends or family when you drink?
- Lie about your drinking?
- Miss classes or work because of hangovers?
- Have troubles caused by drinking again and again?
- Need to drink more and more to get the same effect?

If you answered yes to 3 or more of these questions, you may need to get help.

## What's a drink?

These all have the same amount of alcohol:

- 12-ounce beer
- 10-ounce microbrew
- 4- to 5-ounce glass of wine
- 8- to 9-ounce malt liquor
- 1½-ounce shot of 80-proof liquor

## You can get help

Trying to stop drinking by yourself can be hard, especially if you have a drinking problem. But you can get help if you ask for it.

### Contact:

- Your local health department
- A clinic or private health provider
- A campus health center
- A counselor
- An alcohol treatment program

You can also contact Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), or attend a meeting. Find local information at [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org).



**"I decided to get help when I couldn't stop drinking on my own."**

This fact sheet is not intended as a substitute for your health professional's opinion or care.

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