

Alcohol Use Disorder

In Asian Americans



The MGH Center for Cross-Cultural
Student Emotional Wellness

Did you know?

- Heavy alcohol use significantly increases risk for dementia (memory loss).
- In many Asian cultures, it's a sign of respect to hold, drink, receive, and/or pour any liquid with two hands, with your head slightly bowed, particularly when exchanging drinks with a senior.
- Alcohol is processed through the liver. Many East Asians don't have a liver enzyme that helps break down alcohol properly. Because of this, alcohol in many East Asians becomes a toxic

breakdown product which can damage your DNA, increase the risk for cancer, as well as lead to facial flushing ("Asian glow").

- In the US, alcohol is the most commonly abused drug. Marijuana is the second most commonly abused drug.
- If you are caught driving while intoxicated, it can cost you several thousand dollars and you may be legally obligated to report it on your college application and/or job application.



Why do many East Asians get red when they drink alcohol?

Why do people drink alcohol?

- Social norms
- To temporarily improve mood
- To temporarily decrease anxiety
- Peer pressure
- To relieve stress
- To have "fun"

Alcohol use can be a form of "self-medication" for people who are trying to cope with deeper emotional problems or anxiety. These people need help, not more shame or stigma. Often, connecting them to counseling or 12-step programs can make a huge difference.

Did you know you could have permanent memory loss from heavy alcohol use?

What kind of medical problems can alcohol cause?

- Alcohol use disorder is the #1 risk factor for death and disability in the world among those who are 15–49 years old.
- Alcohol carries a higher risk for death than cigarettes, accidents, or suicides.
- It can impair the way you think in the short and long run:
 - How does it impair you in the short run? You act impulsively, you slur your words and you can't walk straight. This is why people get arrested for drinking and driving.
 - In the long run, with chronic drinking, you are at higher risk for permanent memory loss and dementia.
 - What happens soon after you stop drinking? It can lower your mood and increase anxiety.
 - Overall, alcohol is a depressant. It slows your brain and it can cause emotional problems.
- Alcohol use while pregnant can cause permanent damage to your baby.
- It is also associated with medical problems:
 - high blood pressure
 - liver disease
 - heart disease
 - cancer of the breast, mouth, throat, esophagus, liver, and colon
 - stroke



What contributes to alcohol use among Asian Americans?

- Recent immigrants experience stress arising from economic hardship, occupational problems, acculturation difficulties, and social isolation, which lead to the development of alcohol use disorder.
- Asian Americans who reported experiencing unfair treatment had higher odds of alcohol abuse/dependence disorder.
- Peer pressure and wanting to "fit in" can be contributors to drinking, especially during the high school and college years. This issue was highlighted by several alcohol-related deaths at Asian American fraternities.

Cultural phenomenon in the East Asian communities that may lead to increased alcohol use:

- Many companies have weekly or monthly dinners with co-workers.
 - Known as *Hoesiks* in Korea.
 - Known as *Nomikai* in Japan.
- General common rules for these dinners:
 - Employers may look at missed attendance unfavorably.
 - Culturally, there is a heavy emphasis on respecting your seniors and hierarchy. With this context in mind, it may be difficult to refuse a drink from a senior.
- There is significant stigma associated with obtaining treatment for alcohol and/or psychiatric treatment.



Do you know anyone in your family who drinks alcohol?

What are some of the signs that indicate that you or your loved ones may have a problematic relationship with alcohol?

- Blacking out, or falling asleep and not remembering events that occurred after drinking.
- Loss of control over the amount and frequency of alcohol use.
- Multiple problems in work, school, and/or relationships because of alcohol use.
- Loss of opportunities as a result of alcohol use.
- Increasing amount of alcohol needed to feel desired effects.



How do I know if I have a drinking problem?

AUDIT is a medical questionnaire to assess for excessive drinking.

1 drink equals | 12 oz. beer = 5 oz. wine = 1.5 oz. liquor (1 shot)

Scoring | 0 = never 1 = less than monthly 2 = monthly
3 = weekly 4 = daily or almost daily

Questions	Score
How often during the last year have you...	
...found that you were not able to stop drinking once you had started?	0 1 2 3 4
...failed to do what was normally expected from you because of your drinking?	0 1 2 3 4
...needed an alcoholic drink in the morning to get yourself going after a heavy drinking session?	0 1 2 3 4
...had a feeling of guilt or remorse after drinking?	0 1 2 3 4
...have you been unable to remember what happened the night before because you had been drinking?	0 1 2 3 4
Have you or somebody else been injured as a result of your drinking?	0 1 2 3 4
Has a relative or friend, doctor or other health worker been concerned about your drinking or suggested that you cut down?	0 1 2 3 4

Final score:

- Score of 8 or more is associated with harmful or hazardous drinking.
- Males: Score of 15 or more is likely to indicate alcohol dependence.
- Females: Score of 13 or more is likely to indicate alcohol dependence.

What is Alcohol Use Disorder?

A chronic psychiatric illness in which a person continues to drink alcohol despite significant problems from alcohol use.

How common is alcohol use disorder in Asian-Americans?

- Rates of daily heavy drinking were noted to be lower in Asian Americans (18-19%) when compared to Whites (23-30%) in 2001-2002.
 - Alcohol use disorder may be underreported and/or underdiagnosed in Asian or Pacific Islanders in the US due to the "model minority" stereotype.
 - While Asian American may have lower rates of substance use than White Americans, they are less likely to receive treatment.
- Heavy episodic drinking and alcohol use is increasing among US-born Asian American young adults (18-25 years old).
- Alcohol abuse in Asian Americans increased by two-fold to five-fold within 10 years.
- Many Asian Americans have higher rates of substance abuse than first-generation immigrants.

I want to stop drinking. What do I need to know?

- If you drink heavily and daily, do not stop drinking abruptly and let your doctor know of your intention to stop drinking as abruptly stopping can be life threatening.
- You can have seizures, hallucinations, and extremely high blood pressure or heart rate that can lead to a stroke or a heart attack.
- You can get sick enough to go into the critical care unit.
- You may need specific treatment called detox to prevent life-threatening health issues.



What is detox?

- Alcohol detoxification, or detox, is a process of stopping alcohol use in a medically safe way, usually with the help of medications.
- Some detoxes require a hospital admission, but others can be done in specialized detox facilities or even at home with the help of your doctor.

Are there any medications or nonmedication treatment to help with alcohol use?

- After a successful detoxification, medications are available to reduce cravings for alcohol:
 - Naltrexone
 - Acamprosate
 - Disulfiram
- There are also therapies that are shown to be helpful:
 - Motivational enhancement therapy
 - 12-step programs, such as Alcoholics Anonymous
 - Cognitive behavioral therapy
 - Group therapy
- For some, rehabilitation in residential programs may be helpful.

