

## The American Counseling Association's "Counseling Corner" Weekly Columns

### When Alcohol Becomes A Problem

from the American Counseling Association

In our socially-oriented society, it doesn't seem like a problem. A cold beer on a hot summer afternoon... a glass of wine with dinner... what could be wrong with that? In most cases, moderate consumption of alcohol really isn't a problem, but for growing numbers of people their drinking doesn't stop with just a couple of beers.

Current statistics from the National Institutes of Health report that almost 90,000 Americans die from alcohol-related diseases each year, with alcohol-impaired driving responsible for over 30 percent of automobile fatalities. These same studies find that almost 25% of adults have been binge drinking in the previous month and that more than 16 million Americans suffer from an alcohol use disorder.

Perhaps because alcohol consumption is so common (more than 70 percent of Americans report having drunk alcohol some time in the past year), it's difficult for most drinkers to recognize when alcohol consumption has become a problem. That's understandable. The short term effect of drinking is a positive one, making us feel good. It's hard to link those good feelings to the negative consequences which tend to occur later, may be subtle at first, and may seem unrelated to our drinking.

Yet there actually are clear warning signs that alcohol has become a problem. One of the earliest is that people close to the person begin complaining about the amount of drinking taking place. That often happens after drinking-related arguments with family, friends or other loved ones, or may occur after drinking has led to work problems, an auto accident or other harmful incidents.

If alcohol use is affecting family, school or other obligations and relationships, or if drinking has been heavy enough to blank out memories of the night before, it's a clear sign that it's time to take action.

This isn't easy to do. People tend to feel that admitting to an alcohol problem makes them look weak or sick. In reality, it's an indication of strength, of wanting to control a situation before it gets out of hand.

A local mental health center or hospital can provide a list of professional counselors who specialize in substance abuse. While it may be difficult at first to admit there is a problem, taking action early can help avoid serious, life-threatening problems for the person, his or her family, and anyone else who may be impacted by the consequences of their drinking.

*"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to [ACAcornet@counseling.org](mailto:ACAcornet@counseling.org) or visit the ACA website at [www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org).*

###

words: 399