

Getting real about the true risks of alcohol



Alcohol use is on the rise. COVID-19 caused a lot of stress and anxiety for many of us. We were isolated from one another and looking for ways to cope. One study compared how much people were drinking in the summer of 2020 to the previous summer. They found adults were drinking 14% more.¹

The study also found that one in four people were binge drinking at least once a week. For men, binge drinking means having five drinks in one sitting. For women, it's four drinks. Women had a 41% increase in days of heavy drinking.

It's easy to understand why many women are drinking more. Alcohol is marketed as a normal way to cope with stress. And during the pandemic, women reported higher rates of worry and changes in sleep and mood. Stay-at-home orders meant less childcare support and helping with remote learning, much of which fell to women.²

Unlike many products during that time, alcohol was easy to access. Sales surged during the early months of COVID-19. In late March 2020 in the U.S., alcohol sales increased 54%, compared to the year before. From 2019 to 2020, online sales of alcohol increased 262%.³



It can seem that alcohol helps bring anxiety down. But drinking more only worsens mental health problems. It can also lead to short-term and long-term health problems.

- 261 people die from causes related to alcohol every day (95,000 per year)⁴
- Alcohol is the third leading preventable cause of death in the U.S.⁵
- These deaths shorten the lives of those who die by an average of 29 years.⁶

More than 50% of these deaths are caused by the chronic impact of using alcohol. These include certain types of cancer, stroke, liver disease and heart disease.⁷

Considering these facts, it's important to find healthy ways to cope with stress. Healthy eating, sleep and exercise can boost physical and mental health. Look at how much you're drinking and think about what changes you may want to make. It can be hard to make changes to new or old drinking habits. Learning more about recovery can be a good first step.



A helpful resource for information about recovery is **liveandworkwell.com**. Log in using your HealthSafeID® or company access code: EAP.



You can also connect with a specialist trained in addressing substance use. Consider calling the Optum Substance Use Disorder Helpline at **1-855-780-5955**. It's confidential and available 24/7. We understand your privacy is important.



If you're experiencing thoughts of suicide or something else that is urgent or an emergency, call 911 or the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: **988**.

1. Pollard MS, Tucker JS, Green Jr HD. [Changes in Adult Alcohol Use and Consequences During the COVID-19 Pandemic in the US](#). JAMA Network Open. Research Letter. Sept. 29, 2020. Accessed June 2021.

2. Sugerman D, Greenfield S. [Women, alcohol, and COVID-19](#). Harvard Health Blog. April 6, 2021. Accessed June 2021.

3. Pollard, Tucker, Green.

4. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. [Alcohol Facts and Statistics](#). Updated June 2021.

5. NIAAA.

6. CDC. [Deaths from Excessive Alcohol Use in the U.S.](#) Last reviewed Jan. 14, 2021.

7. NIAAA.

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