What can I do when alcohol becomes a problem?

A person does not have to be an alcoholic to have problems with alcohol. If you find yourself experiencing any of the following, then you may be having trouble controlling your drinking:

— Drinking to calm your nerves or forget your worries,
— Lying about or hiding your drinking habits,
— Needing to drink increasing amounts to achieve the desired effects,
— Feeling guilty about your drinking,
— Causing harm to yourself, family, and/or friends as a result of drinking, or
— Feeling irritable or resentful when not drinking.

There are many resources that are available if you find yourself or a friend becoming too dependent on alcohol. Here are a few suggestions:

The Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board’s Bureau of Alcohol Education offers a variety of alcohol education materials free of charge.

For more information, please contact us:

Office of Regulatory Affairs
Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board
Bureau of Alcohol Education

Northwest Office Building
Harrisburg, PA 17124-0001

www.lcb.state.pa.us

Or call our toll-free line:

1 (800) 453-PLCB (7522)

Hearing Impaired: TDD/TTY (717) 772-3725

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As an adult who is of legal drinking age, 21 years old or older, the choice is yours when it comes to alcohol. Seventy per cent of American adults either do not drink at all, or limit how much alcohol they drink in order to maintain their health. If you choose to drink, you should make informed and responsible decisions about alcohol.  

What is alcohol?
Alcohol can be simply defined as a drink or liquor that contains the intoxicating agent of ethanol. It acts as a depressant that slows down your body’s central nervous system and if consumed excessively it can cause damage to your liver, kidneys, brain, stomach, and other organs.

Alcohol affects men and women differently. Because women usually have less muscle tissue than men and have less of a certain stomach enzyme that aids in the breakdown of alcohol, it typically takes less alcohol to affect a woman than it does a man of the same weight.

You have heard it before and it is still true, impairment begins with the first drink. Alcohol begins to affect your body long before you ever feel it or notice its effects.

What is a drink?
One 12-ounce beer, one 5-ounce glass of wine, one 8-ounce serving of malt liquor, and one 1.5-ounce shot of eighty-proof liquor all contain the same amount of alcohol and each is equivalent to one drink.

1 National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 2011

How can I avoid problems when drinking?
Moderation is the key when you decide to drink alcohol. It takes your body approximately one hour to process and remove the alcohol from just one alcoholic drink. Because of this, you should try to limit yourself to one drink or less per hour. Remember that drinking coffee, taking a cold shower, or exercising will NOT speed up this process. Only time can make a person sober.

A few other ways that you can avoid problems include:
- Never drink on an empty stomach. Food will help slow alcohol’s absorption into the bloodstream.
- Do not drink with the intention of getting drunk.
- Have a designated driver take you where you need to go if you have been drinking.
- If you are hosting a party where alcohol is being served, take the focus away from drinking. Provide exotic nonalcoholic drinks, plenty of food, and fun activities for your guests.

Remember that deciding to drink is an individual choice. If someone chooses not to drink, you should respect his or her decision. He or she may not like the taste of alcohol, may not be in the mood to drink, may be pregnant, may be serving as the designated driver, or may not drink due to personal or religious beliefs.

What is responsible drinking?
Although most adults do drink responsibly, some make dangerous decisions when it comes to alcohol. If you do not understand the effects of alcohol or take the steps to minimize the potential problems before you start drinking, you are putting your life and the lives of others in jeopardy.

Alcohol should NOT be consumed by anyone who is...

- Under the age of 21 years old.
It is against the law for anyone under the age of 21 to drink alcohol. It is also illegal for you to sell or give alcohol to someone under the age of 21, even if it is your own child.

- Operating a motor vehicle.
By now we are all aware of the dangers of mixing alcohol while operating a car, motorcycle, watercraft, or any other moving vehicle. It takes just one drink to slow down your reaction time and impair your vision.

- Working.
Alcohol will prevent you from working at your top level and could possibly keep you from getting that promotion that you have always wanted.

- Taking medications.
If you consume alcohol while taking over-the-counter, herbal, or prescription medications, it could cause a severe reaction to occur. You should always check with your doctor or pharmacist about the restrictions and possible side effects when taking medications.

- Trying to conceive, pregnant, or breastfeeding.
Drinking during pregnancy can cause birth defects that are associated with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. If you drink alcohol while you are breastfeeding, it could have an adverse effect on the development of your child’s motor skills.

- Playing sports or participating in other recreational activities.
If you drink while engaging in activities like football, hunting, snowmobiling, swimming, or boating, you are putting yourself and others at risk. If you feel that alcohol has to be included on the days of these events, wait until the event is complete and then drink responsibly.