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What You Should Know About Alcohol

by Raymond Francis

Alcohol has been woven into the fabric of human culture for millennia, but for millions of Americans alcohol has become something more—it has become the center of their lives. The U.S. Office of Technology Assessment estimates that alcohol abuse may add \$150 billion to our health-care costs, and cause over \$50 billion in losses in the workplace. Alcohol is involved in 50% of our traffic fatalities, 64% of suicides, 86% of murders, 50% of rapes, 69% of drownings, and 83% of burn victims. Despite this destruction, more and more young people are abusing alcohol every year.

Low doses of alcohol can both relax and exhilarate, and a glass of wine with a meal doesn't appear harmful. But at higher doses it can impair and stupefy. Alcohol is extremely toxic to virtually every organ system. Alcohol poisons and impairs the function of the brain, heart, liver, kidneys, lungs, gut, and pancreas. It depresses the central nervous system and impairs judgment and functioning, causing accidents and injuries.

Alcohol is also very addictive. Milan & Ketcham, in their book *Under the Influence: A Guide to the Myths & Realities of Alcoholism*, outline the biochemical pathways by which people can become alcohol dependent. Excessive alcohol consumption causes cells and tissues to adapt to the alcohol in order to survive. These adaptations by the liver, the energy production mechanism of cells, and the central nervous system alter a person's biochemistry and metabolism to the point where they can't function well without alcohol. Alcohol then becomes a necessity, and eventually the toxicity of the alcohol brings them down.

Excessive alcohol causes malnutrition. Vitamin B1 is depleted. B1 deficiency can affect the metabolism of many other nutrients, which are dependent on B1, as well as causing gradual withdrawal from reality and disintegration of personality. Alcohol injures gut tissue and causes malabsorption—a failure to absorb nutrients from the gut. Further, alcohol contains no nutrients and supplies only empty calories. Worse, it uses up precious nutrients for its metabolism. The malnutrition resulting from all the above has a catastrophic effect on overall health.

While there is recent evidence that two drinks a day can help prevent cardiovascular disease, there is abundant evidence that alcohol abuse will damage the heart muscle. Alcohol abuse is also linked to cancer. Alcohol-induced liver damage appears to leave the alcoholic more susceptible to known carcinogens by impairing the ability to detoxify and excrete these toxins.

There is still another major problem with alcohol. Birth disorders and later dystoreunction can be caused by the alcohol consumption of both the mother and the father. In the *Bible, The Book of Judges* warns pregnant women not to drink alcohol. Ancient Cartage prohibited newlyweds from drinking alcohol on their wedding night.

We now know the ancients were right and have come to realize that alcoholism is a leading cause of mental retardation in the U.S. The term Fetal Alcohol Syndrome includes retarded growth in the womb and during childhood, facial malformations, cardiac defects, joint and limb abnormalities, and central nervous system malfunctions including poor coordination and hyperactivity.

Dr. Judith Hall, a geneticist at the University of Washington estimates that alcohol related birth defects may be as high as one or two per hundred births. As few as two drinks per day has been associated with low birth weights and a higher rate of stillbirths. Even social drinking can be a problem producing defects of varying severity such as hyperactivity and learning problems. In fact, there is no safe level of alcohol consumption during pregnancy. Since many women are not aware of their pregnancy for two months or more, and since the first trimester is a particularly critical time, women wishing to have children must be especially careful. Would-be fathers must also not drink alcohol.

On the bottom line, alcohol is a toxic drug that is doing enormous harm to our population. For optimal health, keep your alcohol consumption to less than two drinks a day, and don't drink at all if you are looking to have children.

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