What is alcohol?

**Alcohol is a drug.** Like other sedatives, it is a central nervous system depressant. Alcohol is the major psychoactive ingredient in wine, beer and distilled liquor and is found in many prescription and over-the-counter medications. It is formed naturally by the reaction of fermenting sugar and yeast spores. The kind of alcohol in alcoholic beverages or medications is ethyl alcohol—a colorless, flammable liquid.

**Can people become dependent on alcohol?**

Yes. Alcohol causes both psychological and physical dependence. When a drinker uses alcohol as an escape from problems and stress and comes to depend on the drug for relief, he or she has developed psychological dependence on it. When repeated drinking produces tolerance (a need to consume more of the drug to obtain the same effect) and the drinker’s body needs alcohol to function, physical dependence has developed. Once dependent, drinkers experience withdrawal symptoms when they stop drinking.

**Can alcohol kill?**

Yes. Most deaths involving alcohol are due either to traumatic injuries or to illnesses and organ deterioration caused by long-term, heavy drinking. However, even infrequent drinkers can die from respiratory failure after drinking a large dose of alcohol (in some cases less than a pint of distilled liquor) in a short time. Severe alcohol withdrawal also can cause death, and alcohol in combination with other drugs, particularly other sedatives, results in many fatal overdoses.

What help is available to those with alcohol problems?

**Treatment is available in outpatient, residential and hospital inpatient treatment centers. In addition, research shows the support of other recovering persons such as those in Alcoholics Anonymous can help a person get sober and maintain sobriety.**

Just talking about your problems sometimes leads to new solutions. If you or someone you know needs information, guidance or help, contact the resource and numbers listed below or look in the yellow pages for local professionals who can help.

**Colusa County Department Of Behavioral Health**

162 E Carson

Colusa CA 95932

Phone: (530) 458-0520

Or

24-Hour Toll Free

1-888-793-6580

24-Hour Crisis Services Are Available

Design by Kathy Craigo Media Consulting, 430 Market Street, Suite A, Colusa Ca 95932 (530) 458-3704 or kerigol66@hotmail.com
What effect does alcohol have?

Alcohol slows down the brain's functions. It negatively affects muscle coordination, vision and other senses, memory and judgment. The larger the dose, the greater the effect. In large doses, alcohol's depressant effect on the brain can cause unconsciousness, coma, respiratory failure and death. It is true that alcohol has a calming or tranquilizing effect. But we've all experienced rowdy drinkers. That's because alcohol's depressant effect also slows down the brain centers that regulate our ability to control our actions and emotions. Lowered self-control often leads to loud or aggressive behavior and outbursts of emotion, such as crying jags, bouts of self-pity and even intense - and often inappropriate - expressions of friendship and love.

In addition to the immediate effects of drinking, alcohol taken in larger quantities over a long period of time can damage many body organs, including the liver, heart and brain.

Why does alcohol seem to affect people differently?

Individual physical, mental and environmental factors determine how people react to alcohol or any other psychoactive drug. How fast and how much alcohol is consumed, whether there is food in the stomach and such factors as weight, tolerance, personality, mood and environment all affect how much impairment different people experience and how they behave.

How many Americans drink?

Surveys vary in their results, but, in general, about one-third of American adults do not drink or drink very little. About 30% drink one or two drinks a week. About 20% consume one or two drinks a day. About 10% drink three or five drinks a day. Even fewer, perhaps 5% of Americans drink more than five drinks a day.

Even though it's illegal for anyone under 21 to possess alcohol, children as young as 9 years old report drinking. Over time, national surveys have shown that about one-fifth of 8th-graders, a third of 10th graders and half of 12th-graders report drinking alcohol in the 30 days prior to the survey.

Why do people drink?

People may choose to drink alcohol for cultural, religious, medical, social or personal reasons. Wine is considered an element of sacrifice or ceremony in certain religions. Some people use alcohol as a folk remedy. Most alcohol use is for social purposes, to relax and get-togethers or to celebrate an occasion. Some people use alcohol to forget their worries for the moment or to escape reality. Drinking for escape or relief is a warning sign for problem drinking.

What dangers are associated with social drinking?

The term "social drinking" can be confusing. Even many heavy drinkers think of themselves as "social" drinkers, because they socialize with others who drink just as heavily.

Health professionals say social drinking constitutes drinking no more than one standard drink per hour and no more than three drinks in one day, but not everyday. To not drink at all is appropriate for many people, such as pregnant women, those not yet 21 years old, those who are driving, those using medications, those who are chemically dependent and those who abstain for medical, health, religious or personal reasons. A standard drink contains approximately one-half ounce of pure alcohol. That means one 12-ounce beer, one five-ounce glass of wine, or one ounce of 100-proof liquor.

All drinking is risky to some degree. Even moderate amounts may affect the health of some individuals. Conflicting research makes it clear that it is too early to assume that moderate alcohol consumption has any health effect. In addition to health effects, we certainly know that even social drinking can be dangerous if a person drinks and then drives an automobile, boat or other vehicle. Even one or two drinks impairs a driver's judgment and reaction time. So does a hangover. Of the 50,000 deaths from auto crashes each year in this country, about half are alcohol-related, and alcohol is a factor in a large number of boating deaths and injuries.

How are women affected by alcohol?

Women's bodies absorb and process alcohol differently than men's bodies. Even adjusting for weight differences, in general, women mentally and physically experience the effects of alcohol more keenly than do men. Studies show female alcoholics tend to have more heart and alcohol-related liver problems than do men. Women also tend to stay with alcohol-abusing partners at greater rates than men, and one study showed that 57% of female victims of domestic or intimate violence reported their abuser was drinking.

How does alcohol affect pregnancy?

Women who drink heavily during pregnancy (more than two standard drinks per day) have a higher risk than other women of delivering babies with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome or Fetal Alcohol Effects, conditions of physical, mental and behavioral abnormalities. Binge or daily light drinking by the mother may also affect the unborn child. Women are advised to avoid drinking alcohol during pregnancy.

What is alcoholism?

Alcoholism is a disease characterized by, among other things, the drinker's loss of control over his or her drinking and continued drinking despite major negative consequences. One episode of intoxication does not make an alcoholic, but frequent intoxication is a symptom of alcoholism.

In general, people are said to have a problem with alcohol or be alcoholic, if they cannot control their drinking, if they are dependent on the drug and if their drinking has a negative impact on their physical or mental health, their families, friends and/or jobs.

There is no age limit on alcoholism. Teenagers can be alcoholics. So can senior citizens.