



Understanding... Alcohol Abuse

What is Alcohol Abuse?

Generally speaking, alcohol abuse is the use of alcohol to deliberately alter our mood or confidence, and is often brought about by some underlying personal difficulty.

Drinking alcohol in small quantities can be beneficial in that it is a social activity in some cultures. There are also possible long-term medical benefits. Furthermore, some cultures often encourage drinking as a means of social integration. As a result of this 'acceptance', it is sometimes difficult to recognise when drinking has become a problem. A person who drinks nothing at all in the week and then binges once at the weekend is more at risk than one who drinks small amounts more regularly. Binge drinking is where people consume an excessive amount of alcohol because they want to experience the effects of being inebriated. It can be defined as more than 5 drinks in one session for men or 4 drinks in one session for women.

In the short term, alcohol abuse can lead to accidents and personal injury as well as to liver damage, which can occur in relatively young individuals if they have been consistently abusing alcohol.

In the longer term, excessive drinking can result in a whole range of physical and psychological complications and, ultimately, in death.

In order to avoid problems associated with alcohol use, it is recommended that people abstain or stick to safe consumption levels which are:

1 drink per day for adult females

2 drinks per day for adult males under 65 years of age

1 drink per day for anyone aged over 65

Those people who have problems controlling their alcohol intake are advised to abstain completely.

The above recommendations are based on the idea that a drink refers to a:

Standard beer

Shot of bar measured spirits – not strong spirits

Bar/restaurant measure of wine – not illegal or traditional wines

Continued overleaf

In the UK, the Department of Health advises that the sensible drinking limits for men and women are as follows:

- 3 or 4 units a day or 28 units a week for men
- 2 or 3 units a day or 21 units a week for women
- 1 unit is equivalent to half a pint of standard lager or beer or one standard glass of wine.
- 1 bottle of Alco pop is roughly equivalent to 2 units of alcohol.

Malaysia's legal blood alcohol limit for driving is 80mg of alcohol in 100ml of blood. The legal age to drink alcohol in Malaysia is 21 years.

Helping Yourself

The symptoms of alcohol abuse vary from individual to individual. Ask yourself whether your drinking regularly (or even sometimes) results in the following:

- Getting into fights or arguments
- Finding it difficult to get up in the morning
- Feeling depressed (see Understanding Depression leaflet)
- Suffering from financial worries
- Concern from friends and family members about your drinking habits
- Ensuring that you keep alcohol readily available
- Accidental injury
- Finding it hard to cope with stressful situations
- Being arrested
- Blackouts
- Drinking and driving

If you recognise any of the symptoms listed above and think you may have a drinking problem, then you have already taken the first step towards helping yourself.

There are immediate steps you can take to help yourself. Try:

- Setting yourself an upper limit and asking your friends to help you to stick to it
- Alternating alcoholic drinks with soft drinks or water (use the same glass for water and wine in a restaurant so that you can monitor your intake)
- Eating before you drink alcohol
- Avoiding situations where you know you will be obliged to drink
- Having 'days off' from drinking alcohol
- Avoiding spirits
- Drinking low alcohol drinks
- Avoiding alcohol when you feel particularly stressed

However, you may also need to seek professional help and there are many resources available in NUMed. Contact details for some of these can be found at the end of this leaflet.

NUMed has a Student Support Team who can help you both with changing your drinking pattern and thinking about any problems that are related to it.

Helping Others

If you think that a friend or member of your family has a drinking problem, confronting them about it can be difficult and may result in resentment and denial. It is important to avoid trying to bring the subject up in a confrontational way or whilst your friend is drunk. Your friend needs to come to terms with their problem themselves, but you can help by providing them with information and support in a non-confrontational way. If they recognise that they have a problem, you can help by:

- Signposting (i.e. Giving them the contact details shown at the end of this leaflet, or passing them this leaflet itself)
- Talking about the various support services and what type of help each provides
- Trying to help them understand any underlying problems which is causing them to drink excessively
- Talking about aspects of their behaviour that you think have changed.
- You can also assist by helping them to set themselves targets or schedules and establish new routines to help them break out of the destructive cycle of drinking.

If they don't or won't recognise their problem and only if it is safe to do so let them know how their drinking is affecting themselves and others and let them have a copy of this leaflet.

Remember that if you are suffering as a result of a friend or family member's drinking problem, then you may need support yourself. Some of the support services listed at the end of this leaflet are intended specifically for friends and family members of people with drinking problems.

GETTING SUPPORT

In the University:

You can talk confidentially to the Dean of Student Affairs or other members of the Student Support Team.

Email: student.support@ncl.edu.my

Webform: studentsupport.newcastle.edu.my

Or make an appointment at the Student Office.

Outside the University:

Your GP or family doctor can be a useful first point of contact. In some cases, your doctor will refer you for more specialised help and support. Sometimes it is easier to talk to someone over the phone.

Alcoholics Anonymous

Tel. No.: 019 717 2093

Website: <http://www.aamalaysia.org/>

The Befrienders Johor Bahru

The Befrienders offers confidential emotional support through a helpline and email service.

Helpline (1pm to 12am): 07 33 123 00

Email: sam@befriendersjb.org

Website: <http://www.befriendersjb.org/>

Hospital Permai

Trunk Line/Operator: 07 231 1000

Emergency (BDM): 07 231 1170

URGENT HELP OR SUPPORT

Emergency Services

If you are worried about your safety or feel at risk of harming yourself, or if you are worried about the safety of a fellow student, you need to access help immediately.

If you feel your life is in imminent danger, you should call 999 or go to Accident and Emergency at the nearest hospital.

For emergencies on campus, call NUMed Security. NUMed Security (24/7): 07 555 3881/3984/3985

Out-of-Hours Help

Out-of-hours on weekdays and on week-ends, you may call the NUMed Senior Officer-of-the-Day emergency number.

NUMed Senior Officer-of-the-Day: 011 1231 1276

