Understanding .... Alcohol Abuse

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

What is Alcohol Abuse?
Drinking alcohol in small quantities can be beneficial in that it is a social activity. There are also possible long-term medical benefits. Furthermore, western student culture often encourages 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.

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.

The Department of Health advise 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.

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 Newcastle. Contact details for some of these can be found at the end of this leaflet.

Student Wellbeing has counsellors and Student Wellbeing Advisors 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 your tutor or, if you are in halls, to your hall warden. **Student Wellbeing Service** offers both support and practical information

The **Student Advice Centre** (Floor 1, Union Society) also provides a free and confidential, professional advice and support service.
Tel. 0191 239 3979, e-mail: sac.reception@ncl.ac.uk

The **University Chaplains** are available to listen, and to act as a point of contact for different religious groups. They can be contacted on 0191 222 6341

**Outside the University:**
Your GP is a useful first point of contact. In some cases, a GP will refer you for more specialised help and support.

**Alcohol and Drugs Service**
Plummer Court
Carliol Place
Newcastle upon Tyne
Tel: 0191 219 5600

**North East Council on Addictions**: [http://www.neca.co.uk/](http://www.neca.co.uk/)
Derwent Point
Clasper Way
Swalwell
Newcastle Upon Tyne
NE16 3 BE
Tel: 0191 414 6446
Email: info@neca.co.uk


**Alcoholics Al-anon (support for relatives)**
61 Great Dover Street
London SE1
Tel: 020 7 403 0888
Email: enquiries@al-anonuk.org.uk

**Student Wellbeing**: [www.ncl.ac.uk/students/wellbeing/](http://www.ncl.ac.uk/students/wellbeing/)