

## 3.10 Alcohol in the United States

### To the teacher:

The following fact sheet and activities on alcohol use in the U.S. are designed for high intermediate to advanced learners. They can be used as an impersonal prompt for discussion of:

- Alcohol and culture
- Varied individual responses to alcohol
- How to identify an alcohol problem
- How alcohol problems are addressed in the U.S. and elsewhere

### Some Words You Might Need to Pre-teach

alcohol, alcoholism, culture, dependence, withdrawal, genes, consequences, relationships, public/private, seizure

**Further information on alcohol abuse and dependence** from a U.S. perspective can be found at the following websites. After students have been through the activities below, they could do some independent research and follow-up reporting at the starred websites.

- [National Institute on Drug Abuse \(NIDA\): Alcohol](#)
- [\\*NIDA Easy-to-Read Drug Facts: Alcohol Facts](#) may be useable by some ELLs; has audio for the text on the page and videos ELLs can watch
- [\\*MedlinePlus: Alcoholism](#) many helpful articles on different aspects of alcohol use, some in easy English and some in different languages
- [Alcoholics Anonymous](#): Site translates into Spanish and French.
- [Information on Al-Anon](#): support network for people who are family or friends of alcoholics; site translates into Spanish and French



## Alcohol in the United States

Many people drink alcohol in the United States. Alcohol is available in many places and we see it a lot on TV and in movies. Alcohol is part of U.S. culture. Talking about drinking alcohol can be difficult.

Some people can drink a lot of alcohol and have few problems from it. Some people can drink only a little and have big problems from it. In some people, alcohol can hurt physical health, emotional health, relationships, and daily functioning.

### Why do people have alcohol problems?

We don't know for sure. Scientists believe that some people have genes that make it easy for them to get addicted to alcohol. Some people believe that stress and trauma can contribute to alcohol problems for some people. Maybe the reason is both genes and environment.

### How do we know if drinking alcohol is a problem for someone? What are some ways that *you* know?

In the U.S., doctors consider many things to decide if someone has an alcohol problem. Here are questions doctors consider:

- How much alcohol does the person drink?
- How often does the person drink?
- What **consequences** happen because of the person's drinking?
  - Does alcohol use prevent the person from meeting their responsibilities for *work, school, or family*?
  - Does the person have problems with *relationships* because of alcohol use?
  - Does the person have *legal* problems from alcohol use (like being arrested for drunk driving or for getting in fights)?
- Does the person use alcohol in dangerous situations (like driving)?
- Can the person stop drinking without **withdrawal** problems?  
Withdrawal means problems that start because you stop drinking alcohol. Alcohol withdrawal problems can include things like shakes, sweats, anxiety, depression, nightmares, seizures, and nausea. **How do we try to help people with alcohol problems in the United States?**



There are different ways people get help for alcohol problems in the U.S. Some people go to public or private treatment programs. Treatment programs provide counseling, education, and medications to help people stop drinking and stay away from alcohol.

- Some people go to self-help groups like **Alcoholics Anonymous**. In these programs, people with alcohol problems help each other to stop drinking.
- Some people can stop by themselves, but this is very rare and difficult. It can be dangerous, too, because stopping alcohol without medications can cause seizures and death.
- Some family members and friends of alcoholics get counseling or go to support groups, too, because it can be very difficult be around someone with a drinking problem.

**What are some places in your community that people can go to find help for an alcohol problem?**

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## How Much is Too Much?

### Read the stories.

1. Jose was 16 when he came to the United States. He felt shy, nervous, and confused by everything new at first. He got a job in construction where he made friends. After work every day, he and his friends drink 3-6 beers and relax in the apartment they share. They stay home, eat supper, go to sleep, and get up on time for work the next day.
2. Maryam doesn't drink alcohol that often. She mostly drinks at parties once or twice a month. When she does drink, she usually drinks a lot and doesn't remember much the next day.
3. Minh was at a holiday party for his work. He had a couple of drinks. On his way home, he drove through a red light. A police officer stopped him. The officer smelled alcohol. He gave Minh a breathalyzer test. The test showed Minh had a blood alcohol level of .1. The safe level in Virginia law is .08. Minh was a little over the legal limit.
4. Ashok doesn't drink often, but when he drinks he gets in a bad mood. His wife notices that when he has a few drinks he yells at her and the children. Sometimes he hits them, which he doesn't do when he is not drinking. If he drinks when they are at a party, he often gets in a fight with another person at the party.

### Now discuss these questions for each story above.

1. Do you think this person has a drinking problem?
2. What things made you think the person has or does not have a problem?
3. If the person continues to drink like this, what do you think will happen to him or her?
4. If this person was your friend or relative, would you say or do something to help? What could you say or do?

