

When the Party's Over: Substance Abuse and Your Life

If you're like 18 million Americans, you drink too much. If you're like 6 million Americans, you use illicit drugs. If you're 18 to 25 years old, you are in the group with the most problem drinkers. One-third of this age group also uses illicit drugs.

"What's the big deal?" you may ask. "Everyone parties," you may say. You may tell yourself that your alcohol and/or drug use is not a problem; you have *control* over it. It's just *partying*.

Denial is what it really is. *Denial* about the negative impact substance abuse has on your life and the people around you.

The consequences of alcohol abuse

The *truth* is that the consequences of alcohol and drug abuse place an enormous burden on American society. As the nation's No. 1 health problem, substance abuse strains the health care system and the economy, harms family life and threatens public safety. Heavy drinking contributes to the top three causes of death: heart disease, stroke and cancer.

There are more deaths and disabilities each year in the United States from substance abuse than from any other cause. Half of all traffic and boating fatalities, drownings and fire-related deaths are alcohol-related.

Fetal alcohol syndrome is the leading known cause of preventable birth defects. Nearly 10 million children live with a parent dependent on alcohol and/or illicit drugs; half of them will grow up to have an alcohol or substance abuse problem themselves.

Facts about substance abuse and the workplace

"What I do in my private time is my personal business; it's not a problem for me at work!"

You may say you don't use alcohol or other drugs *on the job* so it's none of your company's business. Check out these facts:

- The average substance abuser costs her company \$7,000 annually in lost wages and profits due to low productivity, absenteeism, accidents and injuries, legal and health costs.
- Substance-abusing workers are three times more likely to be tardy or absent than non-substance-using workers.
- Nearly half of all industrial injuries and fatalities can be linked to alcohol consumption.
- One-fourth of workers report being injured or put in danger, having to re-do work or cover for an impaired co-worker, or having to work harder or extra hours due to an impaired co-worker's absence or poor performance.
- The majority of businesses engage in pre-employment, random and/or post-

accident drug testing. Most job dismissals due to a failed drug test involve marijuana (detected up to 30 days) and cocaine/amphetamines (detected up to 72 hours).

“OK, but my partying truly hasn’t affected my job! If I drink a few beers and smoke a joint on my own time to relax, so what?”

Research shows that, on average, it takes eight years for an alcohol problem to be detected on the job. This means that most people go to special lengths to hide their substance abuse problems from their employer, and many employers have difficulty effectively recognizing and intervening with substance-abusing employees.

Addiction can affect your job and your personal relationships

Addiction is called a “family disease” because drugs and alcohol take a toll on the abuser’s loved ones. As a pattern of consumption leads to a pattern of abuse, personal relationships are affected. Bouts of intoxication result in financial burden and family disharmony, verbal and emotional abuse, and the risk of domestic violence. Marriages are strained or destroyed by partying that has gotten out of control. Children are subject to neglect, abuse or the torment of growing up in a dysfunctional family environment. What starts as the abuser’s attempt to relax and socialize often becomes a pattern of overconsumption, resulting in deteriorating health and destroyed relationships.

Take an honest look at your alcohol and/or drug consumption. Do you see any negative consequences of your partying? Hangovers, missed work deadlines, increased sick days, arguments with your loved ones, lack of dependability, financial strain? If so, you may be developing an unhealthy relationship with drugs and/or alcohol.

Ask yourself: Is it worth it? Is it worth losing your job over alcohol or substance abuse? What about your family—don’t they deserve better? If you have a problem, call your employee assistance program (EAP) for free, confidential and professional help.

Resources

Alcoholics Anonymous
www.alcoholics-anonymous.org

National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence
www.ncadd.org

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