



Hidden in Plain Sight: Alcohol Use Disorder

Alcohol use disorder (AUD), commonly referred to as alcoholism, is the most prevalent substance use disorder (SUD) in the world. Despite its ubiquity, it often goes unnoticed or underestimated as harmless social drinking, because the line between casual consumption and problematic drinking can be ambiguous. More than 65 million Americans report binge drinking in the past month, which is more than 40% of the total of current alcohol users. Meanwhile, an estimated 15 million people struggle with an alcohol use disorder in the U.S., but less than 10% of them receive treatment. It's crucial to recognize the warning signs of AUD, not only for the individual affected but also for friends and family who may not fully grasp the seriousness of the situation.

The Signs of a Serious Problem

Many people enjoy a drink to unwind, socialize or celebrate, but when does drinking cross the line from social to problematic? One of the key indicators is the need to drink alcohol to fall asleep. While a nightcap might seem harmless, relying on alcohol for sleep can signal a deeper issue.

Consistent lateness or absenteeism from work or other responsibilities can be another red flag. When drinking starts to interfere with daily life functioning, it's a sign that alcohol may be taking priority over other important aspects of life. Weight changes, either gain or loss, can also indicate emerging AUD, as alcohol can both stimulate and suppress appetite. This change in eating habits, coupled with the calories consumed from alcohol, can lead to noticeable physical changes.

Financial struggles are another significant indicator. Alcohol can be expensive, and frequent purchases can quickly add up and lead to economic stressors. For example, a nightly 12-pack of beer at around \$15 each can cost nearly \$5,500 annually. Similarly, a daily \$10 glass of wine or a mixed drink at a bar can also cost thousands over a year. Add to that the consequences of actions spurred by impaired judgment, such as a DUI charge, and you could be paying as much as \$10,000 in fines.

[More on Page 2](#)



More than 65 million Americans report binge drinking in the past month, which is more than 40% of the total of current alcohol users.

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse & Alcoholism

LCT00153-20240903



Increased conflict with family, friends or significant others often accompanies AUD. As drinking becomes more central to an individual's life, relationships can suffer. Arguments, misunderstandings and neglect can strain even the closest bonds, leading to social isolation and a further reliance on alcohol to numb emotions.

Taking the First Step Toward Recovery

Recognizing the warning signs of AUD in yourself or a loved one is the first crucial step towards recovery. It can be challenging to admit that drinking has become a problem, but acknowledging the issue is essential for making positive changes. If any of the above signs sound familiar, it's important to seek help. There are numerous resources available, including counseling, support groups and medical treatment options.

The journey to recovery is not easy, but it is possible. With the right support and commitment, individuals struggling with AUD can reclaim their lives and rebuild damaged relationships. The road to recovery begins with a single step — acknowledging the problem and seeking help.

#SupportSobriety

If you or someone you know is struggling with substance use or addiction, call the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) National Helpline at 1-800-662-4357.

