

RISKY BINGE DRINKING

Most of the alcohol-related problems experienced by university students stem from “risky binge drinking”. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) defines binge drinking as consuming five or more drinks for a man and four or more drinks for a woman during a 2-hour period.

Attitude is everything!

Self-awareness, which is a fundamental tool for self-control in social settings, is a core skill to be acquired. Some of the factors associated with alcohol consumption are as follows;

- **Peer Pressure;** “Have a taste of it, just for the sake of having fun!” Some people drink alcohol to gain acceptance among their peers.
- **False Perceptions;** “It will do no harm if you drink only *once!*” Alcohol that is designed for drinking can cause individuals to become addicted to the substance. People may not have the control to stop drinking after they start. Alcohol use can result in a dangerous cycle of addiction in a short time span.
- **Escapism;** “You will forget about your worries!” Drinking alcohol is typically viewed as a moment of escape from stressful situations or real-life problems. Contrary to popular belief, however, alcohol causes individuals to lose some of their capacity to solve problems.
- **Avoidance of a Feared Social Situation;** People who feel tension/anxiety in social settings may tend to have alcohol to ease their distress and feel more comfortable. Those who drink alcohol on a regular basis can develop tolerance to alcohol’s effects. In other words, they reduce their sensitivity to alcohol and need more alcohol for the same effect. Individuals with a higher tolerance to alcohol, therefore, may consume increasing amounts of alcohol, particularly when they are living alone. People who feel excessive stress in social settings should consider seeking professional help instead of drinking alcohol to relax. After all, alcohol consumption, which is not a real solution, can cause adverse health effects as well.

Consequences of Risky Binge Drinking:

Binge drinking behavior, regardless of how often it is performed, may lead to health complications that last for a long time in addition to posing serious health and safety risks.

Death: Approximately 88,000 people die worldwide each year due to alcohol-related causes, including alcohol-related accidents and chronic health problems such as liver cancer, according to the data released by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). In addition, 10% of the deaths in individuals aged 20-64 are caused by excessive alcohol consumption.

Sexual Assault and/or Being Assaulted: Risk of being assaulted by others who consume excessive amounts of alcohol in spaces where alcohol is consumed. Individuals who drink excessive amounts of alcohol will be more likely to be sexually assaulted since they will be more vulnerable than those who do not. Sexually transmitted diseases and accidental or undesired pregnancies can also be considered among the indirect consequences of sexual assault caused by excessive alcohol consumption.

Academic Problems: Those who drink excessively are at risk of having problems such as absences from work or school, poor concentration, learning disability, and poor exam performance.

Alcohol Use Disorder: It covers a spectrum of unhealthy alcohol consumption behaviors, including binge drinking and addiction, that gets out of control and affects physical or psychological comfort as well as social life.

Alcohol Poisoning: Alcohol poisoning occurs when a person drinks a toxic amount of alcohol, usually over a short period of time. Signs of alcohol overdose include severe mental confusion, irregular breathing, bluish skin color, extremely low body temperature, vomiting, seizures, and cold or wet skin. **Call 112 immediately if you recognize the symptoms of alcohol poisoning.**

Other Consequences; Suicide attempts, health problems, unsafe sexual behavior as well as vandalism and fighting incidents that constitute crime and where the police got involved.

! If you have friends who put pressure on you to drink/to drink more in social situations; just say “NO!” consistently to resist their pressure. Look them in the eye when you say “NO”, and say it with confidence.

How to help yourself

- ✓ If you binge drink regularly and don't know what to do, you need to begin with being honest with yourself. You can note down how much you drink and potential consequences of this drinking pattern in the short and long term.
- ✓ Be self-aware of places and people (triggers) that cause you to have a strong need or urge to drink. Get rid of the alcohol in your room, in your home and replace the drinks you consume with non-alcoholic beverages. Identify and avoid the triggers that could urge you to start consuming alcohol again.
- ✓ Avoid drinking games –which involve the consumption of alcoholic beverages,
- ✓ Don't be afraid to ask for help. Try to do the necessary research to get help from mental health professionals and/or doctors. The primary care provider you contact will refer you to a specialist to ensure that you are receiving the care most appropriate for your condition.

Conditions of people suffering from binge drinking tend to worsen over time. It is therefore very important to recognize the early signs of alcohol addiction. Negative consequences can be avoided if diagnosed early. If you have a friend who is addicted to alcohol, it is of critical importance to refer him/her to the nearest Psychiatric and/or Addiction Treatment center (e.g. Yeşilay Danışmanlık Merkezi-YEDAM-:+90 392 444 7975).

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