

# NATIONAL ALCOHOL SCREENING DAY

## TALKING POINTS/Q & A's

### 1. What is National Alcohol Screening Day?

- National Alcohol Screening Day (NASD) is a national, one-day outreach, education and screening event conducted by hospitals, clinics, faith based organizations, treatment centers, advocacy groups, colleges, primary care offices and community groups.
- NASD is a program that provides free, confidential screening for alcohol problems, public education and where necessary, referrals to treatment, in health fair settings at community sites, colleges, primary care settings.
- This year, a continued focus on alcohol and health provides information about alcohol using a non-stigmatizing theme that is relevant for anyone who drinks alcohol
- This program also provides information and guidance for those who are concerned about a friend or family member.

### 2. Why is there a need to implement widespread screening for alcohol-use disorders?

- Alcohol problems are common and under identified
- Of those 14 million individuals who in the past year have alcohol abuse or dependence, only 10% have sought treatment.
- At-risk drinkers make up a significant portion of the adult population in the U.S.
- Widespread screening will allow the identification of individuals who should cut down on alcohol use and provide them with information on how to do this.
- Screening and brief intervention work.
  - The success of brief interventions for drinking problems is well supported by research conducted over the past 25 years. The approach can be an effective treatment for some alcohol use disorders without the need for further clinical intervention. It also may resolve mild to moderate alcohol problems, enhance the client's readiness to address more severe drinking problems, and result in acceptance of a treatment referral. (*Alcohol Problems in Intimate Relationships: Identification and Intervention. A Guide for Marriage and Family Therapists. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Rockville, MD, 2003*)

### 3. Who should be screened?

- **Anyone who drinks** should be screened in order to determine if alcohol use is problematic.
- However, there are **important subgroups** who will benefit from targeted health messages:
  - **Elderly**-often not identified; can be at risk with relatively small amounts of consumption due to medication interactions

- **Women of childbearing age**-need to know that if they are pregnant, nursing or planning a pregnancy that no amount is considered safe.
- **Individuals with a family history of alcohol problems**-individuals are at an increased risk for developing alcohol problems if a first-degree relative was an alcoholic or heavy drinker.
- **College students**-need to be aware of the consequences of drinking from occasional to binge drinking.
- **Individuals with existing medical or mental health conditions** that are exacerbated by alcohol use or on **medications** that interact with alcohol.

#### 4. Why is a research institute such as NIAAA supporting National Alcohol Screening Day?

- More than 30 studies, many supported by NIAAA, indicate the efficacy of screening and brief intervention for alcohol problems early on, before addiction and other serious problems occur.
- Yet this is currently not routine practice in health care delivery settings in the United States.
- NASD presents an opportunity to promote alcohol screening to the general public and health professionals alike in making it as acceptable as taking an individual's blood pressure or measuring cholesterol levels.
- NIAAA supported research over the past 30 years has led to the development of important public health information about the consequences of drinking more than moderate amounts of alcohol.

#### 5. What are NIAAA screening guidelines for moderate drinking?

- Men--no more than 14 drinks per week and no more than 4 drinks per occasion
- Women--no more than 7 drinks per week and no more than 3 per occasion
- Men and women Over 65--no more than 1 drink per day

#### 6. What are the goals for NIAAA/SAMHSA on National Alcohol Screening Day (NASD)?

- To increase the visibility of alcohol problems and the importance of incorporating screening into routine practice in medical and other health professional settings (e.g, pharmacies) in the U. S.
- To raise awareness of the consequences of at-risk drinking.
- To increase public and professional involvement in identifying persons in need of intervention and treatment.
- Raise public awareness about alcohol's effect on health
- Help community members or patients reassess their drinking
- Refer those who need treatment
- Enhance visibility and use of treatment services in communities, on college campuses and in primary care settings

## **NATIONAL ALCOHOL SCREENING DAY 2004 TALKING POINTS and Q&A's ON ALCOHOL USE DISORDERS**

### **1. Do you have to be an alcoholic to experience problems?**

- NO.
- Alcoholism is only one type of alcohol problem. NASD addresses the full range of alcohol use disorders.
- A person can abuse alcohol without actually being an alcoholic-that is, he or she may drink too much and too often but still not be dependent on alcohol.
- Some of the problems linked to alcohol abuse include not being able to meet work, school, or family responsibilities; drunk-driving arrests and car crashes; and drinking related medical consequences.
- Under some circumstances, even social or moderate drinking is dangerous-for example, when driving, during pregnancy or when taking certain medications.

### **2. Are specific groups of people more likely to have problems?**

- Alcohol abuse and alcoholism cut across gender, race, and nationality. Nearly 14 million people in the United States--1 in every 13 adults--abuse alcohol or are alcoholic. In general, more men than women are alcohol dependent or having alcohol problems. And alcohol problems are highest among young adults ages 18-29 and lowest among adults age 65 and older.
- People who start drinking at an early age greatly increase the chance that they will develop alcohol problems at some point in their lives.

### **3. What is a safe level of drinking?**

- For most adults, moderate alcohol use--up to two drinks per day for men and one drink for women and those 65 and older--causes few if any problems.
- Standard Drinks: One drink equals one 12-ounce bottle of beer or wine cooler, one 5-ounce glass of wine, or 1.5 ounces of 80 proof distilled spirits.
- Certain people should not drink at all-
  - Women who are pregnant or trying to become pregnant
  - People who plan to drive or engage in other activities that require alertness and skill
  - People taking certain prescription medications or over-the counter medicines
  - People with medical conditions that can be made worse by drinking
  - Recovering alcoholics
  - People younger than 21

### **4. Is it safe to drink during pregnancy?**

No, drinking during pregnancy is dangerous. Alcohol can have a number of harmful effects on the baby. The baby can be born mentally retarded or with learning and behavioral problems that last a lifetime. We don't know exactly how much alcohol is required to cause these problems. We do know, however, that these alcohol-related

birth defects are 100% percent preventable, simply by not drinking alcohol during pregnancy. The safest course for women who are pregnant or trying to become pregnant is not to drink alcohol at all.

### **Alcohol and the Elderly**

Persons aged 65 and older make up the fastest growing segment of the American population. Approximately, 70 percent of the adult population consumes alcohol at least occasionally and 10 percent drink daily. About 60 percent of men and 30 percent of women have had one or more adverse alcohol related life events. Although the extent of alcoholism in the elderly is debated, the diagnosis and treatment of alcohol problems are likely to become increasingly important as the elderly population grows.

Alcohol's effects do vary with age. Slower reaction times, problems with hearing and seeing, and lower tolerance to alcohol's effects put older people at higher risks for falls, car crashes, and other types of injuries that may result from crashes.

Older people also tend to take more medications than younger people. Mixing alcohol with over-the-counter or prescription medicines can be very dangerous, even fatal. More than 150 medicines interact harmfully with alcohol. In addition, alcohol can make many of the medical conditions common in older people, including high blood pressure and ulcers, more serious. Physical changes associated with aging can make older people feel "high" even after drinking only small amounts of alcohol. So even if there is no medical reason to avoid alcohol, older men and women should limit themselves to one drink per day.

### **Alcohol and Women**

Alcohol affects women differently than men. Women become more impaired than men do after drinking the same amount of alcohol, even when the differences in body weight are taken into account. We know that some of this risk is due to gender differences in metabolism; it also could quite possibly be due to gender-related differences in brain chemistry, in genetic risk factors, or to entirely different factors that are currently unknown. This is why the recommended drinking limit is lower for women than men.

In addition, chronic alcohol abuse takes a heavier physical toll on women than on men. Alcohol dependence and related medical problems, such as brain, heart, and liver damage, progress more rapidly in women than in men.

#### References:

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism website, <http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/faq/faq.htm>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services website, <http://www.samhsa.gov>

Tenth Special Report to the U.S. Congress on Alcohol and Health, June 2000, U.S.  
Department of Health and Human Services,  
<http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/10report/intro.pdf>

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**Those interested in finding a screening site in their area can call  
TOLL FREE 1-877-311-NASD (6273) or visit [NationalAlcoholScreeningDay.org](http://NationalAlcoholScreeningDay.org).**