

Alcohol Awareness / A special insert to the Capital Times

Are You A Problem Drinker?

..By Denise Reinas

Ethyl alcohol is one of the most widely abused drugs in America. Approximately 105 million Americans (age 18 and up) are drinkers, and it is estimated that about 10% of American drinkers (approximately 10 million people) may experience problem drinking or become alcoholics.

The definition of alcoholism, given by the American Medical Association, is "an illness characterized by significant impairment that is directly associated with persistent and excessive use of alcohol." Alcohol is addicting. With continuous use, the body learns to adjust to alcohol, and this could very well lead to addiction and alcoholism.

For the alcoholic or problem drinker, intoxication may not be the only result of drinking. Other results may be injury or death, job loss, quarreling and fighting with friends and family members, loss of friends and family members, and diseases associated with excessive drinking. There are many problems which can result from alcoholism, but they can be avoided and/or corrected if the alcoholic becomes aware of his/her problem and wants to correct it.

WHAT KIND OF DRINKER ARE YOU?*

Take this test and find out for yourself.

Directions--Check the appropriate space to the left of each question.

YES NO

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 1. Do you think about drinking often? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2. Do you drink more now than you used to? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 3. Do you sometimes gulp your drinks? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 4. Do you often take a drink to help you relax? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 5. Do you drink often when you are alone? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 6. Do you sometimes forget what happened while you were drinking? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 7. Do you keep a bottle hidden somewhere --at home or at work--for a quick pick-me-up? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 8. Do you need a drink to have fun? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 9. Do you ever just start drinking without really thinking about it? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 10. Do you drink in the morning to relieve a hangover? |

If you had four or more "yes" answers, you may be one of the 10 million Americans with a drinking problem.

* Source: National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.

Once the alcoholic becomes aware of his/her problem and decides that he/she wants help, the first step is to find out what treatment and intervention is all about. There are also programs available that help the family of the alcoholic to deal with related problems.

Al-Anon is a program that encourages family members to find an acceptable life-style for themselves despite the alcoholic's actions. Also, Al-Anon tries to help family members understand their own inappropriate responses toward the alcoholic and teaches behavior that may possibly lead the alcoholic back to health.

Al-Ateen is similar to Al-Anon but is directed specifically towards teenagers with an alcoholic parent.

Drunks Are Not Very Funny

By Jan Travers

The key to curbing alcoholism in this country is establishing standards of moderation, according to a Penn State, Harrisburg professor.

Dr. James Rooney, associate professor of sociology and a member of the board of Dauphin County Drug and Alcohol Services, said we have looked at alcohol for too long in a good and bad light. "The standards are ambivalent," Rooney charged.

By this, he meant that we condemn drunkenness at the same time as we laugh at it. "W.C. Fields made his living portraying drunks," said Rooney. So has Foster Brooks and Dean Martin. In many of the soaps and evening dramas we see people drinking heavily for relief when pressure or problems invade their lives. "The

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problem with this is that in the drama, when the problem is solved, the heavy drinking stops. This is not necessarily the case," said Rooney.

Rooney, who has done extensive research in alcohol abuse and addiction, recommended three things to do if you suspect you need help with an alcohol problem. First, go to a treatment center for an evaluation. In Central Pennsylvania alone, there are 14 different public agencies alone. In addition, quit drinking for 60 days and when you

do drink, don't drink more than three drinks in any one day. "If you can't stop after three on consecutive days, you need help," said Rooney.

Is education the key to decreasing the alcohol abuse problem? Rooney said not entirely. A survey done by him in the late seventies analyzed drinking habits of high school students in five states. Rooney found that the states where the drinking age was higher, 20 and 21, had a higher proportion of students who drank illegally than the three states whose drinking age was 18 years old. "The law has an opposite effect than intended," said Rooney.

"Formal rules don't work well," said Rooney. Rather than this, he thinks campaigns like "Friends don't let friends drive drunk" are more effective. "People are more responsive to peer pressure than to rules," said Rooney, pointing out that there is only a 1 in 1,000 chance of being stopped by a police officer while driving under the influence.

However, programs like the "designated driver" program, though well intended, can also send mixed signals. It is designed that a group who is going out on the town have one person who promises not to drink, and will be responsible for seeing the others get home safely. The problem with this, said Rooney, is the drinkers won't get in trouble with the law but it gives the drinkers a green light that they can drink as much as they want. "We are setting inconsistent standards in our society," said Rooney.

These standards must be changed. We must stop condoning drunkenness before we can cure the problem. Moderation is the key.

Each member is sponsored by an Al-Anon or AA member and is taught to deal with his/her problem much like the other programs teach.

Alcoholics Anonymous is for the alcoholic himself, although anyone who is interested may attend an open meeting. AA's main stress is on abstinence from alcohol.

All of these programs, Al-Anon, Al-Ateen, and AA are self-help groups; they are not professional programs with trained family therapists; they are a grouping of people with similar problems who support each other. These meetings can be found in virtually every community, day or night, up to seven days a week.

