Alcohol and Memory

Although most of us tend to remember things very well, it is not uncommon for us at times to misplace car keys, forget a name or forget a significant item while grocery shopping. Memory loss can have a variety of causes including fatigue, depression, nervousness, stress, nutrition, trauma, alcohol and other drugs.

After digestion, alcohol in the bloodstream enters the body’s cells quickly interrupting their normal functioning. Alcohol also disrupts proteins concentrated in the cells’ membranes, therefore slowing the development of memories in the brain.

For those who drink a significant amount of alcohol, memory lapses tend to be even more common. Memory loss or amnesia while under the influence of alcohol is called a “blackout.” Blackouts can last up to several hours or even days, and the person experiencing a blackout will not remember most events after a session of heavy drinking. Experiencing blackouts can be an early warning sign of alcohol abuse. Current information suggests that the frequency of blackouts is usually an indication of the severity of the alcohol abuse/alcoholism.

Another consequence of blackouts is that intoxicated individuals are less likely to recall or even acknowledge an injury to the body because alcohol hinders normal brain functioning. The recent use of CAT scan technology has revealed significant long-term brain tissue damage for individuals with a history of alcohol misuse.

In a recent experiment at Duke University, rats given high amounts of alcohol for twenty days had a difficult time finding their way through a maze they previously had been trained to navigate, compared to rats that were not given alcohol. This new research implies that people who drink heavily, especially adolescents, may be damaging their brains and increasing their chances of memory loss later in adulthood.

Alcohol Health and Research World: Alcohol and the Brain, 14(2), 1990

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New Research

- The Seattle Post-Intelligencer reported that lemon-flavored malt drinks (also known as “hard lemonade”) increased in popularity for young adults this summer in comparison to beer or wine. More than two million cases of one brand were sold in its first year of availability.

- The Washington Post reported a recent Journal of the American Medical Association study about the use of tobacco products among college students. Even though more than sixty percent of college students had tried a tobacco product, only one-third had used tobacco in the past month of the study. Under fifty percent had used tobacco within the previous year. Students who use tobacco products tend to be more likely to smoke marijuana, binge drink, earn lower grades and spend more time socializing with friends. The survey also found that cigarette smoking rates have remained the same from 1997 to 1999.

- The latest Harvard Alcohol Study shows that binge drinkers drank ninety-one percent of all the alcohol imbibed by college students. Fifty percent of the binge drinkers drank sixty-eight percent of all the alcohol consumed and constituted half of all alcohol-related problems of college students. Less than half of all college students are binge drinkers as defined by this study.

- According to a survey from the journal Thorax, people are nineteen times more likely to be introduced to drugs by a relative rather than a drug dealer. People are five times more likely to become addicted to drugs because of a parent rather than a dealer.

- A survey, directed by Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates at Phoenix House treatment programs, maintains that more women than men are acquiring chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) in the United Kingdom. The number of women with COPD has increased almost seventy percent in the last ten years while the number of men with COPD has stabilized. COPD is highly preventable because tobacco smoking is a primary cause.

CAMPUS RESOURCES

University Counseling Services
La Maison Health Center - 2nd Floor
(Sherry Benton) Phone: 532-6927

Alcohol & Other Drug Education Service
Director: Bill Arck
214 La Maison Health Center
Phone: 532-6927

Alcoholics Anonymous
Open Noon Meeting (Mon.-Fri.)
Ecumenical Campus Ministry
1021 Demison
Phone: 537-9542
776-8306

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