

Dear Raven:

What exactly is alcoholism? The reason why I am asking this question is because I think a lot of people assume they know but really don't know the facts of what it is.

Curious

Dear Curious:

Since alcoholism was officially recognized as a disease in 1956 by the American Medical Association, there have been several official definitions. The information in them is consistent and includes the following symptoms and conditions:

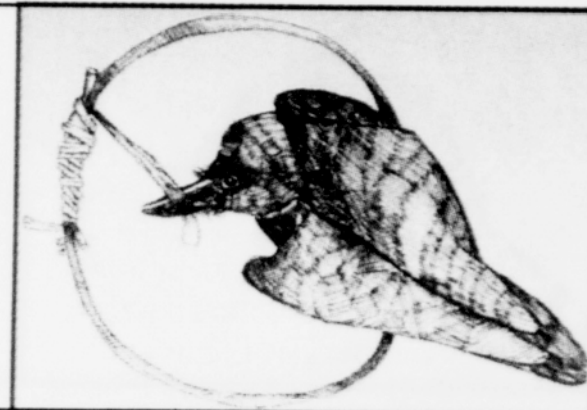
Preoccupation with the drug alcohol – People find themselves thinking about drinking and planning for their next drink.

Loss of control – People cannot predict when they will drink more than they intend to.

Uses alcohol despite negative consequences – Even though bad things have happened in the past,

Ask Raven

Raven will answer your questions about problems associated with alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. You can call in your questions to the numbers below or mail them to Raven, P.O. Box 549, Siletz, OR 97380-0549.



people continue to drink and risk more consequences. Consequences can include legal problems like a DUI or violent behavior, loss of custody of family, loss of employment, financial problems and health problems.

Distortions in thinking, primarily denial – Denial takes the form of minimizing drinking (I only drink on weekends, I only drink beer), rationalizing drinking (I drink because ...), or dishonesty (unable to be honest with others about the amount and frequency of their drinking).

It is chronic – It lasts a lifetime. Even when people start drinking after a period of sobriety, they can expect that at

some future time they will start to experience alcoholic symptoms.

It is progressive – As the alcoholic continues to drink, the disease can only get worse. For some people, as they age their drinking pattern may change and even seem to lessen. Symptoms, however, will persist as long as they use alcohol.

Incurable – There is no known cure for alcoholism (despite TV ads).

Primary – While alcoholism can cause physical and mental health problems, the disease itself remains the primary condition. Example: The cause of death for a person who dies of cirrhosis of the liver is alcoholism.

Genetic – Alcoholism can be genetically inherited. People who have parents who are alcoholics are four times more likely to become alcoholics themselves.

Psychosocial and environmental – Others become alcoholic by engaging in heavy drinking over a period of time and relying on alcohol to manage stress and cope with life's difficulties.

I would like to close this letter to you by saying that alcoholism is treatable and can be in remission for a lifetime. It requires complete abstinence from alcohol and support from family and friends. Many recovering alcoholics will say they are now grateful they became alcoholics because their program of recovery has enriched their lives in so many ways.

Thank you for writing. I hope this helps you and others understand this disease, which has been described as "cold and calculating." If you would like to have more information, please contact me or someone at the Tribal Alcohol & Drug Program, call the 24-hour AA hotline at 541-265-1953, or go to www.aa-oregon.org.

Raven

The Truth About Alcohol – No Matter What You Call It Slang – Booze, Sauce, Brews, Brewskis, Hooch, Hard Stuff, Juice

By Jenifer Metcalf, A&D Prevention Coordinator



Alcohol affects your brain.

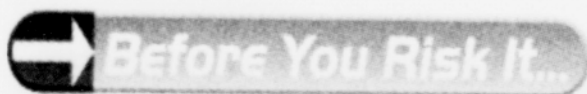
Drinking alcohol leads to a loss of coordination, poor judgment, slowed reflexes, distorted vision, memory lapses and even blackouts.

Alcohol affects your body. Alcohol can damage every organ in your body. It is absorbed directly into your bloodstream and can increase your risk for a variety of life-threatening diseases, including cancer.

Alcohol affects your self-control. Alcohol depresses your central nervous system, lowers your inhibitions and impairs your judgment. Drinking can lead to risky behaviors, such as driving when you shouldn't or having unprotected sex.

Alcohol can kill you. Drinking large amounts of alcohol at one time or very rapidly can cause alcohol poisoning, which can lead to coma or even death. Driving and drinking also can be deadly. In 2003, 31 percent of drivers age 15-20 who died in traffic accidents had been drinking alcohol.¹

Alcohol can hurt you – even if you're not the one drinking. If you're around people who are drinking, you have an increased risk of being seriously injured, involved in car crashes or affected by violence. At the very least, you may have to deal with people who are sick, out of control or unable to take care of themselves.



Know the law. It's illegal to buy or possess alcohol if you are under age 21.

Get the facts. One drink can make you fail a breath test. In some states, people under age 21 can lose their driver's

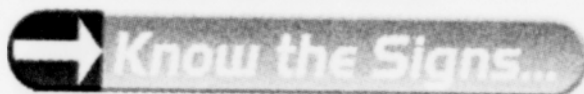
license, be subject to a heavy fine or have their car permanently taken away.

Stay informed. "Binge" drinking means having five or more drinks on one occasion. Studies show that more than 35 percent of adults with an alcohol problem developed symptoms – such as binge drinking – by age 19.²

Know the risks. Alcohol is a drug. Mixing it with any other drug can be extremely dangerous. Alcohol and acetaminophen, a common ingredient in over-the-counter pain and fever reducers, can damage your liver. Alcohol mixed with other drugs can cause nausea, vomiting, fainting, heart problems and difficulty breathing.³ Mixing alcohol and drugs also can lead to coma and death.

Keep your edge. Alcohol is a depressant, or downer, because it reduces brain activity. If you are depressed before you start drinking, alcohol can make you feel worse.

Look around you. Most teens aren't drinking alcohol. Research shows that 71 percent of people 12-20 haven't had a drink in the past month.⁴



How can you tell if a friend has a drinking problem? Sometimes it's tough to tell. But there are signs you can look for. If your friend has one or more of the following warning signs, he or she may have a problem with alcohol:

- Getting drunk on a regular basis
- Lying about how much alcohol he or she is using
- Believing that alcohol is necessary to have fun
- Having frequent hangovers
- Feeling run-down, depressed or even suicidal
- Having "blackouts" – forgetting what he or she did while drinking

What can you do to help someone who has a drinking problem? Be a real friend. You might even save a life. Encourage your friend to stop or seek help. Check with the Siletz Tribal A&D program or meet with the Prevention coordinator to discuss the issue.

The bottom line: If you know someone who has a problem with alcohol, urge him or her to stop or get help. If you drink – stop! The longer you ignore the real facts, the more chances you take with your life.

It's never too late. Talk to your parents, a doctor, counselor, teacher or another adult you trust.

Do it today!

- 1 Traffic Safety Facts 2003 Data: Young Drivers, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation, 2004.
- 2 Prevention Alert: The Binge Drinking Epidemic. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2002.
- 3 Harmful Interactions: Mixing Alcohol with Medicines. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 2003.
- 4 2004 National Survey on Drug Use and Health. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2005.

CEDARR

Instead of the regular monthly meeting on April 7, CEDARR participants are invited to a presentation on Opiate Epidemiology, Addiction and Medication-Assisted Treatment by Eric Martin.

The event will run from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Yaquina View School, 351 SE Harney in Newport, Ore.

The event is sponsored by DHS/Child Welfare and Addiction & Mental Health Services.

Contact Jenifer Metcalf, Tribal A&D Prevention coordinator, at 541-444-8267 or 800-600-5599 for more information.

Enforcing Underage Drinking Laws: EUDL

Providing alcohol to minors is a criminal offense

Specific Laws

471.410(2) – Providing alcohol to a minor (furnishing). An individual of any age can be charged with furnishing – a person does not have to be 21 years or older. "Furnishing" includes any manner of providing alcohol – it does not have to be purchased.

471.410(3) – Allowing alcohol consumption by minors on private property. An individual of any age can be charged – a person does not have to be 21 years old.

471.430(1) – Purchase, attempt to purchase or possession of alcohol by a minor (MIP). This is a Class B violation punishable by a fine of \$299-\$497 and possible loss of driver's license. "Possession" can be either physical possession or constructive possession. Physical possession means the individual has consumed the alcohol, is holding alcohol (even if they have not consumed any) or the alcohol is in the car they are driving and have control over. Constructive possession means the individual is in the same location as and has immediate access to the alcohol.



Siletz Tribal A&D Programs

Prevention, Outpatient Treatment and Women's Transitional

Siletz: 800-600-5599 or 541-444-8286
Eugene: 541-484-4234
Salem: 503-390-9494
Portland: 503-238-1512



Narcotics Anonymous Toll-Free Help Line – 877-233-4287

For information on Alcoholics Anonymous: www.aa-oregon.org

