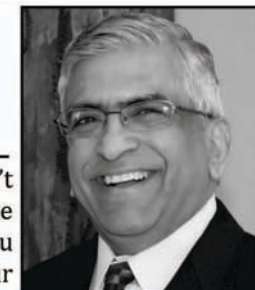


Alcohol, An Acceptable Danger in our Society?

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More people in this country are dying because of alcohol today compared to 20 years ago. The number of alcohol-related deaths have double in the past 20 years. In 1999 there were about 36,000 deaths due to alcohol related problems in the U.S. In 2017 there were almost 73,000 deaths. That is more deaths than due to illicit drugs including opioids (heroin, fentanyl, oxycodone and others). The greatest increase was among women and in people who were middle-aged and older.

Women are drinking more. There has been a greater increase in alcohol consumption and the deaths due to alcohol in women than men during the same period. There was 23% increase in binge-drinking among women during the same period. Binge drinking is defined as four or more drinks for women and five or more drinks for men on any one occasion.

Each year, excessive drinking accounts for one in 10 deaths among U.S. adults aged 20–64 years. Alcohol is the third leading preventable cause of death in the United States. The first is tobacco, with more than 480,000 tobacco-related deaths each year. The second is poor diet and physical inactivity.

Interestingly, the number of deaths due to drunken driving during the same 20-year period actually de-

clined. This is likely due to ride sharing services. Having a designated driver or using ride sharing does save lives!

Many people enjoy a drink now and then. How do you know you might be drinking too much? According to National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), more than 3 drinks per day or more than 7 drinks in a week for women, and more than 4 drinks per day or more than 14 drinks per week for men are indicative of high-risk drinking. Also, if you brag about your ability to hold the liquor, it might be a sign of tolerance, which implies you may already be at risk of drinking too much.

Half the alcohol related deaths are due to alcohol-related liver diseases. Other causes of deaths due to alcohol are heart disease, cancer and accident-related injuries such as falls. Another way alcohol overdose can cause death is by respiratory depression. This can be especially dangerous even when moderate amounts of alcohol is combined with prescription opioid pain killers and benzodiazepines like diazepam (Valium), clonazepam, lorazepam, alprazolam (Xanax) and others. The combination increases the risk of respiratory depression. When the respiratory system is depressed or suppressed, there is less available oxygen and greater

concentration of carbon-dioxide in the blood. This danger from combinations can be especially dangerous in older individuals.

We don't take this danger seriously in spite of these facts. Why? It is because alcohol is socially acceptable, legal and easily available. When you see someone taking a drink you don't think much of it. However, if the same person uses illicit drug like marijuana, heroin or other opioid or other illicit drugs, you may take notice and even be alarmed. Heavy and harmful drinking occurs in the pretext of "social drinking" e.g. happy hour after a hectic week for young professionals. These happy hours can pave the way for some to becoming alcoholic.

I think it is time that we take these dangers seriously. Taking an occasional drink is not evil and may not pose any serious health risks. But the dangers increase when the alcohol use increases or when combined with medications or illicit drugs. It can destroy individual's life, career and family. Think about the heavy price you are paying for brief moments of fun and pleasure. And that too, pleasurable experience is questionable when throwing up from excessive drinking or when experiencing a black out (memory loss caused by excessive drinking). Take charge of

your life. Don't let alcohol take control over you and ruin your life.

SAMHIN, South Asian Mental Health Initiative & Network, is a non-profit organization that strives to address the mental health needs of the South Asians.

If you know someone that has a drinking problem and has a desire to quit visit www.samhin.org/alcoholics-anonymous/ or call 732-902-2561 to learn about free program or if you have any questions. You can also write to us at info@samhin.org.

