



# The Facts About Women and Alcohol

## **How many women are affected?**

- **About 1.6 million alcoholics in the U.S. are women.**
- Women are the fastest growing segment of the alcohol abusing population.

## **Which women have the highest risk of alcohol abuse and alcoholism?**

- Women who have family histories of alcoholism.
- Women who are victims of violence as children or adults.
- Women whose partners are alcoholic.
- Women with binge/purge eating disorders (bulimia).
- Women who are depressed.
- Young women who are single or co-habiting.
- Middle-aged women in transition (divorce, retirement, children leaving home).
- Older women with grief and loss issues.



## **How Alcohol Works on Your Body**

- Alcohol depresses the brain and slows down the nervous system.
- Alcohol enters the blood stream from the stomach so its toxic effects can be seen everywhere in the body.
- The rate at which alcohol gets into your system depends on:
  - How much you drink
  - How fast you drink it
  - The concentration of the alcohol
  - Whether or not you have food in your stomach
  - Gender
- Some drugs, such as valium or sleeping pills, increase alcohol effects.
- Women break down alcohol less efficiently than men do. Problems like liver damage occur more quickly and with less alcohol than with men.
- Women reach higher blood alcohol concentrations than men who drink the same amount because women have less body water.

## **Medical Problems Women Develop from Drinking**

- High blood pressure—that can increase risk of heart attack and stroke
- Enlarged or floppy heart
- Hormone imbalance
- Breast cancer
- Stomach ulcers and intestinal bleeding
- Liver disease such as hepatitis, cirrhosis, pancreatitis
- Malnutrition
- Overweight
- Bone loss

## Questions ?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC Clinic staff are also available to help at any time.

To find a UW Physicians clinic near you, please call 1-800-UW-DOCS

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## How much drinking is safe?

- No more than 1 drink per day for daily drinkers (U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services).
- No more than 2 drinks per day for occasional drinkers.
- One drink means 12 oz. beer, 5 oz. wine, or 1.5 oz. hard liquor.



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