

One more beer and then we go... [1]

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[2]



Are you curious about your alcohol consumption? Take the survey in the article and evaluate your relationship with alcohol.

Today, April 7th, is Alcohol Screening Day. "Ugh! Don't sign me up for that one! Alcoholism. What an ugly word!" Yes, it is. But the reality of life as an alcoholic or having a friend or family member suffering from this health condition is even uglier.

Why does alcohol cause so much trouble and why is taboo to talk about alcoholism? After all, alcohol is a legal product and in Puerto Rico consumption often is glorified.

According to a study published in 2008 by the Administration of Mental Health and Addiction ([ASSMCA](#)) [3], in Puerto Rico it is estimated that one out of every 8 people, about 350,000, suffer from alcohol abuse. In addition, some 140,000 suffer from alcohol dependence. This means that there are almost *half a million Puerto Ricans* who week after week consume more alcohol than is deemed reasonable or healthy.

What is alcohol abuse? What is alcohol dependence?

Let's start by defining what is a drink [4]. A drink is defined as 12 ounces of beer (5% alcohol by volume, ABV), 5 ounces of wine or 1.5 ounces of spirits shot of liquor (e.g. rum, vodka, or whiskey). With the trend in craft beers containing more alcohol by volume, having a 20-ounce bottle of beer with 7% ABV is equivalent to almost 2.5 drinks. If you're are preparing our own drinks, as we do when we go to the beach or we are at a friend's house, and we like them with a bit extra punch, probably in every glass we are drinking the equivalent of two or more drinks. Doing the math is important when evaluating whether you have already had "enough" to drink for one night.

Abusing alcohol means that we drink more than we should. [5] This amount varies between men and women because of the differences in physical constitution and because each metabolizes alcohol in slightly different ways and rates. For a man, more than 2 drinks on average per day (14 per week) or the equivalent of more than 4 drinks on one occasion constitutes alcohol abuse. For a woman it's more than 1 drink per day average (7 per week) or the equivalent of more than 3 drinks on one occasion.

One may think: "Wow! In Puerto Rico everyone is an alcoholic!". Maybe not, but as statistics show, there are at least half a million Puerto Ricans with alcohol abuse problems and that should lead us to reassess our relationship with alcohol.

On the other hand, alcohol dependence means that we can not work or function without having a drink. Alcohol consumption becomes a priority and we neglect our job, family, children, our food, and our overall health. Unfortunately, many of those with dependence are also suffering from mental health conditions such as anxiety or depression and alcohol helps them "to cope better with the situation." This dependence is what we call alcoholism.

Alcohol and the golden lager we worship, among others, have become part of a national pride."I drink the beer of my people, I support my country, from Mayagüez to the world!". But how proud are we when a friend has an accident on his way home and ends with his car in total loss and a few scratches (at best)? Or when we hear the news that a man, or woman, committed an act of violence because he/she was drunk? Or that a child went hungry due to negligence from his parents who drank too much and had a hangover?

Alcoholism is like the lizard on the roof: everyone knows it's there, but until you look, it doesn't exist. During this month dedicated to Alcohol Awareness we will publish several articles on the effects of alcohol [6] on the body and how we can break from this dependence to seize the precious days that we have in planet earth.

To start, take this survey [7] to evaluate your consumption of alcohol. It is completely confidential, just be honest to yourself. The results will probably tell you what you already know, or perhaps you'll be surprised. But it is the first step towards a better quality of life. If you have friends or relatives who you think should take the survey, share the article and the link.

The goal of these articles is not to convince you to stop drinking, rather it's purpose is to let you know what happens when you drink that beer. "Everything in moderation" may sound like a cliché. However, if we can not control our actions and thoughts after drinking alcohol, it's time to rethink our habits. And it's important to know that there are options for help and support [8] and

that we have a role to play to make Puerto Rico a healthier place.

Reference

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