

# Alcohol Abuse and Nutrition

Alcohol abuse is any pattern of alcohol consumption that harms your health, relationships, or work. Alcohol abuse can cause poor nutrition (*malnutrition* or *malnourishment*) and a lack of nutrients (*nutrient deficiencies*), which can lead to more complications. Alcohol abuse brings malnutrition and nutrient deficiencies in two ways:

- It causes your liver to work abnormally. This affects how your body divides (*breaks down*) and absorbs nutrients from food.
- It causes you to eat poorly. Many people who abuse alcohol do not eat enough carbohydrates, protein, fat, vitamins, and minerals.

Nutrients that are commonly lacking (*deficient*) in people who abuse alcohol include:

- Vitamins.
  - Vitamin A. This is needed for your vision, metabolism, and ability to fight off infections (*immunity*).
  - B vitamins. These include folate, thiamine, and niacin. These are needed for new cell growth.
  - Vitamin C. This plays an important role in wound healing, immunity, and helping your body to absorb iron.
  - Vitamin D. This is necessary for your body to absorb and use calcium. It is produced by your liver, but you can also get it from food and from sun exposure.
- Minerals.
  - Calcium. This is needed for healthy bones as well as heart and blood vessel (*cardiovascular*) function.
  - Iron. This is important for blood, muscle, and nervous system functioning.
  - Magnesium. This plays an important role in muscle and nerve function, and it helps to control blood sugar and blood pressure.
  - Zinc. This is important for the normal functioning of your nervous system and digestive system (*gastrointestinal tract*).

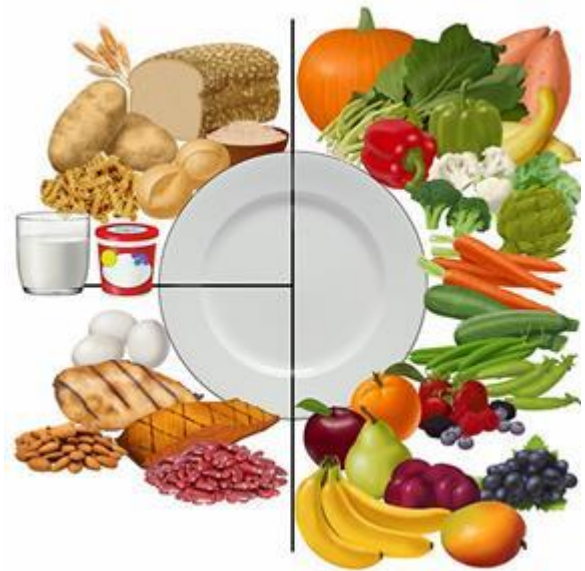
If you think that you have an alcohol dependency problem, or if it is hard to stop drinking because you feel sick or different when you do not use alcohol, talk with your health care provider or another health professional about where to get help.

Nutrition is an essential factor in therapy for alcohol abuse. Your health care provider or diet and nutrition specialist (*dietitian*) will work with you to design a plan that can help to restore nutrients to your body and prevent the risk of complications.

## What is my plan?

Your dietitian may develop a specific eating plan that is based on your condition and any other problems that you have. An eating plan will commonly include:

- A balanced diet.
  - Grains: 6–8 oz (170–227 g) a day. Examples of 1 oz of whole grains include 1 cup of whole-wheat cereal, ½ cup of brown rice, or 1 slice of whole-wheat bread.
  - Vegetables: 2–3 cups a day. Examples of 1 cup of vegetables include 2 medium carrots, 1 large tomato, or 2 stalks of celery.
  - Fruits: 1–2 cups a day. Examples of 1 cup of fruit include 1 large banana, 1 small apple, 8 large strawberries, or 1 large orange.
  - Meat and other protein: 5–6 oz (142–170 g) a day.
    - A cut of meat or fish that is the size of a deck of cards is about 3–4 oz.
    - Foods that provide 1 oz of protein include 1 egg, ½ cup of nuts or seeds, or 1 tablespoon (16 g) of peanut butter.
  - Dairy: 2–3 cups a day. Examples of 1 cup of dairy include 8 oz (230 mL) of milk, 8 oz (230 g) of yogurt, or 1½ oz (44 g) of natural cheese.
- Vitamin and mineral supplements.



## What are tips for following this plan?

- Eat frequent meals and snacks. Try to eat 5–6 small meals each day.
- Take vitamin or mineral supplements as recommended by your dietitian.
- If you are malnourished or if your dietitian recommends it:
  - You may follow a high-protein, high-calorie diet. This may include:
    - 2,000–3,000 calories (*kilocalories*) a day.
    - 70–100 g (*grams*) of protein a day.
  - You may be directed to follow a diet that includes a complete nutritional supplement beverage. This can help to restore calories, protein, and vitamins to your body. Depending on your condition, you may be advised to consume this beverage instead of your meals or in addition to them.
- Certain medicines may cause changes in your appetite, taste, and weight. Work with your health care provider and dietitian to make any changes to your medicines and eating plan.
- If you are unable to take in enough food and calories by mouth, your health care provider may recommend a feeding tube. This tube delivers nutritional supplements directly to your stomach.

## Recommended foods

- Eat foods that are high in molecules that prevent oxygen from reacting with your food (*antioxidants*). These foods include grapes, berries, nuts, green tea, and dark green or orange vegetables. Eating these can help to prevent some of the stress that is placed on your liver by consuming alcohol.

- Eat a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables each day. This will help you to get fiber and vitamins in your diet.
- Drink plenty of water and other clear fluids, such as apple juice and broth. Try to drink at least 48–64 oz (1.5–2 L) of water a day.
- Include foods fortified with vitamins and minerals in your diet. Commonly fortified foods include milk, orange juice, cereal, and bread.
- Eat a variety of foods that are high in omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids. These include fish, nuts and seeds, and soybeans. These foods may help your liver to recover and may also stabilize your mood.
- If you are a vegetarian:
  - Eat a variety of protein-rich foods.
  - Pair whole grains with plant-based proteins at meals and snack time. For example, eat rice with beans, put peanut butter on whole-grain toast, or eat oatmeal with sunflower seeds.

The items listed above may not be a complete list of foods and beverages you can eat. Contact a dietitian for more information.

### **Foods to avoid**

- Avoid foods and drinks that are high in fat and sugar. Sugary drinks, salty snacks, and candy contain empty calories. This means that they lack important nutrients such as protein, fiber, and vitamins.
- Avoid alcohol. This is the best way to avoid malnutrition due to alcohol abuse. If you must drink, drink measured amounts. Measured drinking means limiting your intake to no more than 1 drink a day for nonpregnant women and 2 drinks a day for men. One drink equals 12 oz (355 mL) of beer, 5 oz (148 mL) of wine, or 1½ oz (44 mL) of hard liquor.
- Limit your intake of caffeine. Replace drinks like coffee and black tea with decaffeinated coffee and decaffeinated herbal tea.

The items listed above may not be a complete list of foods and beverages you should avoid. Contact a dietitian for more information.

### **Summary**

- Alcohol abuse can cause poor nutrition (*malnutrition* or *malnourishment*) and a lack of nutrients (*nutrient deficiencies*), which can lead to more health problems.
- Common nutrient deficiencies include vitamin deficiencies (A, B, C, and D) and mineral deficiencies (calcium, iron, magnesium, and zinc).
- Nutrition is an essential factor in therapy for alcohol abuse.
- Your health care provider and dietitian can help you to develop a specific eating plan that includes a balanced diet plus vitamin and mineral supplements.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.