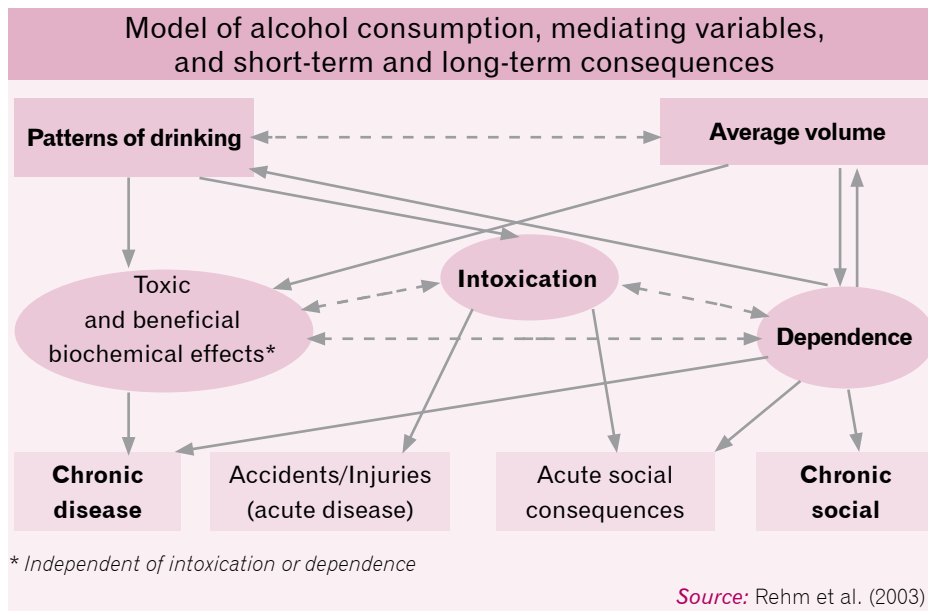




ALCOHOL USE: WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES ?

WHO estimates that there are about 2 billion people worldwide who consume alcoholic beverages, of whom 76.3 million have diagnosable alcohol use disorders. These studies have estimated that globally, alcohol causes 3.2% of deaths (1.8 million deaths) and 4% of Disability-Adjusted Life Years DALYs (58.3 million DALYs). This proportion is much higher in males (5.6% deaths and 6.5% of DALYs) than females (0.6% deaths and 1.3% DALYs) (WHO, 2002a).

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The effects of alcohol use by an individual are widespread and noticeable in all spheres (physical, psychological, social, and economical) of an individual's life. Since every person is part of a family, it impacts other family members as well. Further, the collective and long-term effects are felt by all sectors of the society we live in, the greatest by the health sector. Several non-health sectors like law, judiciary, police, welfare, transport etc., also experience the impact of alcohol use in a significant way.

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Alcohol consumption has health and social consequences via intoxication (drunkenness), alcohol dependence and other biochemical effects of alcohol. In addition to chronic diseases that may affect drinkers after many years of heavy use, alcohol contributes to traumatic outcomes that kill or disable at a relatively young age, resulting in the loss of many years of life due to death or disability. There is increasing evidence that





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besides the volume of alcohol, the pattern of drinking is relevant for the health outcomes.

Overall there is a causal relationship between alcohol consumption and more than 60 types of disease and injury. Alcohol is estimated to cause about 20–30% of oesophageal cancer, liver cancer, cirrhosis of the liver, homicide, epileptic seizures, and motor vehicle crashes worldwide. Unintentional injuries alone account for about one third of the deaths due to alcohol (WHO, 2004).

5.1 Immediate Effects

The immediate effect of consuming an alcoholic beverage varies from individual to individual and includes a flushed appearance, a false sense of relaxation, loss of inhibitions (and thereby more confidence), lack of co-ordination and slower reflexes, blurred vision and slurred speech. Some may even experience headache, nausea and vomiting, mood changes (e.g. aggression, elation, and depression) and sleepiness. At significantly high doses it can result in coma and death.

The effects of increasing Blood Alcohol Concentration on the central nervous system

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| 20 to 30 mg/dl: | Slow motor responses and decreased thinking ability |
| 30 to 80 mg/dl: | Increase in motor and cognitive problems |
| 80 to 200 mg/dl: | Definite impairment of motor co-ordination and judgement; fluctuations in mood and increased risk-taking behaviour |
| 200 to 300 mg/dl: | Marked slurring of speech, inability to carry out simple tasks |
| 300 mg/dl: | Loss of consciousness, convulsions and possible death |

Source: WHO (2003)

The immediate effect of consuming an alcoholic drink varies from individual to individual. At significantly high doses, it can result in coma and death.

5.2 Long-term Effects

Alcohol use for a long period of time causes permanent damage to health. It also results in physical, emotional or social problems. For example, malnutrition, frequent infections, skin problems, liver, heart and brain damage, sexual impotence, reduction in fertility, memory problems, family and relationship problems, poor work performance, legal and financial difficulties are all associated with long-term effects of alcohol

use. Many adverse consequences linked to alcohol consumption are recognized.

Adverse consequences of alcohol use

- ◆ Heartburn, nausea and gastritis
- ◆ Malabsorption syndromes
- ◆ Worsens complications of diabetes
- ◆ Anaemia
- ◆ Risky unsafe sex leading to Sexually Transmitted Diseases most importantly HIV
- ◆ Reduces sexual capacity
- ◆ Increases risk of seizures
- ◆ Addiction and alcohol dependence
- ◆ Depression, anxiety, suicide and other psychiatric symptoms
- ◆ Problems in the workplace
- ◆ Abuse of other substances including tobacco
- ◆ Problems with family members
- ◆ Fatty liver, alcoholic hepatitis and cirrhosis
- ◆ Alcoholic pancreatitis
- ◆ Cardio-vascular effects include: poor BP control, increased cerebral haemorrhage and strokes, cardiac enlargement and failure, and arrhythmias
- ◆ Reduced immunity and increased susceptibility to infections
- ◆ Damages to the musculo-skeletal system
- ◆ Impaired sleep and memory
- ◆ Polyneuropathy
- ◆ Delirium tremens, Wernicke's encephalopathy and Korsakoff's syndrome and hallucinations

Source: Benegal V et al. (2001)

