

# Health And Well-Being

## Your Next Doctor's Visit May Include Questions About Alcohol Use

(NAPSA)—While often portrayed as funny in movies and on TV, intoxication and alcohol abuse are no laughing matter. In fact, it's estimated that more than 30 percent of the U.S. population misuses alcohol.

An estimated 38 million adults in the U.S. drink too much alcohol. But how much is too much? For men, it's more than four drinks per day or more than 14 in a week. For women, it's more than three drinks in one day or more than seven in a week.

So if your doctor or nurse asks you about how much you drink, don't be defensive. It's just one more way they are working to help you stay healthy.

### Many Consequences Of Abuse

Each year, there are 85,000 deaths related to alcohol misuse. Alcohol misuse plays a role in many health problems including liver disease, high blood pressure, certain cancers, problems with mental functioning, and depression.

It's also been found to contribute significantly to injury and deaths from falls, drowning, fires, motor vehicle crashes, murders and suicides. Drinking alcohol while taking prescription medications can cause dangerous levels of sleepiness and also lessen the potential benefit of the medication.

And for expectant women, alcohol not only affects the mother but the development of the unborn child and could cause fetal alcohol spectrum disorder.

There are also economic consequences. Alcohol misuse is said to



**Thirty-eight million adults in the U.S. drink too much alcohol.**

impact the American economy to the tune of \$223.5 billion.

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) recently recommended that health care professionals ask adults about their drinking habits and provide counseling to those who drink at a risky or hazardous level. The Task Force is an independent panel of experts—including doctors, nurses, medical directors and academics—that examines the latest scientific evidence and makes recommendations on preventive services and screenings.

“When people misuse alcohol, there can be serious consequences for themselves, their families and their communities. Alcohol misuse is the cause of tens of thousands of deaths each year in the U.S.—deaths that could have been prevented,” says Task Force member

Sue Curry, Ph.D. “The good news is that primary care professionals can identify adults who engage in risky or hazardous drinking and, through brief counseling, help them drink more responsibly.”

### Screening Can Be Key

Alcohol screenings involve talking to patients about drinking habits, which typically starts by answering a set of questions related to how much and how often alcohol is consumed.

Some of the interventions that may help with alcohol misuse include action plans, drinking diaries, stress management, and problem-solving techniques to address how and when alcohol is misused.

The Task Force recommends that primary care professionals screen all adults over the age of 18 about their drinking habits. For those identified as possibly misusing alcohol, physicians should offer counseling and discuss interventions that may help.

### A Tireless Health Advocate

The work of the Task Force is to evaluate and identify critical preventive health services that a primary care professional can perform as well as steps that people can take.

Consumers may want to consider making changes in their lifestyle and avoiding unhealthy actions—such as alcohol misuse—that can have a negative impact on a person's life.

For more information, visit [www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org](http://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org).