

Alcohol Overuse is Abuse

In the months following the sudden death of singer Amy Winehouse, speculation focused on the likelihood of a drug overdose. However, a coroner's inquest revealed that the 27 year-old died from an acute *alcohol* overdose. Her BAC at autopsy was over five times the legal limit for driving in the U.K. – well into the danger zone where fatal alcohol poisoning can occur. The toxicology report indicated no illegal substances were found in her system; however, police noted the presence of two empty vodka bottles near her body.

The take-away lesson from this tragic event is that alcohol is a legal beverage which poses no imminent danger to millions whose use can be characterized as moderate and responsible. However alcohol *overuse* can have severe consequences. For example, the Centers for Disease Control cites the following research:

- **Genetic mutations** – The membranes of cells are easily penetrated by alcohol and mutations can occur within the DNA of gene cells with prolonged alcohol use. In addition, heavy alcohol consumption can contribute to the spread of internal cancer because it promotes accelerated cell division and growth.
- **Weakened immune systems** – Excessive alcohol intake significantly reduces the body's ability to ward off disease by hindering the production of healthy white blood cells, while limiting the capacity of lymphocytes to kill bacteria. In addition, high alcohol intake depletes the nutrients necessary to strengthen and maintain the immune system.
- **Hormone related cancers** – According to CDC research, a woman's risk for the development of breast cancer tumors increases with excessive

alcohol ingestion. Cancerous cells in the breast feed off estrogen and alcohol triggers increased estrogen levels.

- **Enhancing carcinogens** – Researchers believe that abusive drinking tends to amplify the growth and strength of cancerous cells especially in the esophagus, mouth and larynx.



- **Birth defects** – The CDC has stated that fetal exposure to alcohol is one of the main *preventable* causes of birth defects and developmental abnormalities. According to CDC statistics, as many as one in thirty pregnant women drink excessively or binge drink during pregnancy.

Apart from the physical destruction to one's body resulting from alcohol overuse, writer Christopher Solomon in *MSN Money* (3/22/11) refers to DUI as "the \$10,000 ride home" by tallying the average cost of bail, fines, penalties, court costs, towing fees and increased insurance premiums on a state by state basis.

If you are concerned about your alcohol consumption and would like to discuss it with a professional counselor in a dignified and nonjudgmental manner, please give some thought to contacting your EAP today! Remember that all conversations with the EAP are protected under federal HIPAA regulations.