Trouble controlling my drinking [1]

Dear Alice,

I have just realized that I am not able to handle alcohol. Whenever I go to a bar or a club, I drink to excess. I do not have any urge to drink. However, when I am in a club or a bar, the same thing happens: I drink too much! This is making me think that I am an alcoholic. My question is: Where can I go for help here at Columbia? Thanks.

?Binger

Answer

Dear Binger,

It's good that you've taken time to think about your drinking, but before you diagnose yourself as an alcoholic, it might be helpful to think through these three definitions:

- Someone *abusing* a substance uses alcohol and/or other drugs in ways that threaten her/his health and well-being, and compromises her/his ability to function in social, family, and work situations.
- Someone *dependent on* alcohol and/or other drugs *needs* to take these drugs and *needs* to increase her/his dosage over time to maintain the effects of the drugs.
- Alcoholics have the disease of alcoholism; which can be defined by the interaction of biological, psychological, and social factors. Here are examples of these factors:
  - **Biological**: Genetic differences that predispose someone to alcohol abuse. Sons, daughters, brothers, and sisters of alcoholics are more likely to become alcohol abusers themselves.
  - **Psychological**: Personality and psychological traits that predispose someone to alcohol abuse, including self-medicating unpleasant feelings and depression.
  - **Social**: Environmental factors supporting alcohol abuse - things like job stress, insufficient employment and/or financial resources, relationship problems, and peer pressure to drink.

For some, problem drinking is situational: they may only abuse alcohol when they are in certain environments or when there are specific "triggers" present. Since you've noticed that you drink too much when you're in clubs and bars, these physical places might be triggers for you. There are other influences you may want to consider as well. When you go out drinking, are you with the same people? Do they also drink too much? Do you only go out when you're stressed out or upset about something? If you can identify the circumstances around your
excessive drinking, you may be able to avoid them in the future or address any underlying issues. You can find some ideas for balancing alcohol use by reading Hangover helper and tips for healthy drinking.

Good luck to you,

Alice!

Category:
Alcohol & Other Drugs
Alcohol
Helping & Getting Help

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Craving alcohol after blackout?
How should I help my drunk friend?
Better to have one alcoholic drink every day or many at one time infrequently?
Drinking for stress relief? a problem?
21st birthday coming up? Should I drink?

Resources
Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) (Morningside)
Columbia Health BASICS program (Morningside)
Mental Health Service (CUMC)
Student Health Service BASICS program (CUMC)

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