



Recovery Notes

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Scientific Recovery

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For Problems with Alcohol

OUTPATIENT TREATMENT FOR HIGH-PROFILE WOMEN

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Women, Work and Alcohol

Research has shown that women working full time in professional or management positions are those most likely to develop a problem with their drinking.

Alcohol is the leading drug of abuse by American women. Problem drinking is woven into the fabric of a woman's whole life: her work, her relationships, and her psychological and physical well-being. Both a woman's genetic make-up and her life experiences contribute to her risk for problems with alcohol. Although the potential environmental risk factors are enormously diverse, some kinds of life contexts are particularly important for professional women – work is one of those.

About 45% of American women drink alcohol. Women who work outside the home are more likely to be heavy drinkers – defined as 60 or more drinks a month – than homemakers. Among employed women, those in high-status managerial and professional positions have a higher

prevalence of drinking. However, there is no direct connection between stress on the job and the quantity or frequency of alcohol consumed. Rather, the interface of a complex set of conditions related to work can trigger a predisposed woman to engage in problem drinking.

High-achieving women in demanding occupations face unique vulnerabilities. For example, women in the helping professions may have a tendency to care for the needs of others to the exclusion of their own. These women can attain a strong sense of personal value by being needed and doing a good job with serious, complex responsibilities. Overcommitted and overworked, they often perfect a compelling exterior persona, but over time, can lose touch with their own personal needs. Eventually, alcohol may become their escape from exhaustion, worry, and loneliness. They may also begin to drink at home alone, a practice most frequently found among women who are married, employed, and of upper socioeconomic status, and a routine that can lead to drinking problems.

Taking time to socialize with work colleagues at informal get-togethers can help strengthen working relationships and reward hard work. When the heat is on or when deadlines are pressing, good relationships among work colleagues become crucial. But if people only know each other as official titles and job descriptions, it can be difficult to remember that everyone on the team is a human being, too. A little time spent together outside work can go a long way to creating and maintaining real friendships among colleagues. Getting together in a neutral space can help this happen and pubs and bars are popular choices of venue.

However, these get-togethers in bars and pubs can pose a risk for women who are predisposed

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to problems with alcohol. These settings can lead a woman to drink more than she realizes and invite a level of drinking that has harmful consequences.

Single professional women have an additional risk for alcohol problems. If she has no children, a woman may use alcohol as a way of managing work stress without apparent negative consequences, and she presumably has more time to stop for a drink after work with friends. Single women report a connection between job stress and “escapist drinking” – drinking to relax after work or to forget about problems at work. If the work problems result in low job satisfaction, there is a greater risk of problem drinking.

Women who work in male-dominated occupations operate in a workplace culture that can encourage problem drinking. In fact, these women are more likely to have problems with alcohol than women in occupations that are predominately female. One theory to explain

this discrepancy points to the stresses that come from built-in obstacles – the stress of competing with men on an uneven playing field. A more visible factor is that occasions to drink with coworkers are increased when men establish the occupational drinking norms. In

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many male dominated work environments, opportunities for workers to get to know and bond with each other, as well as some of the work itself, may take place outside of the office, over drinks. Where socializing and drinking are an important part of the job, women may feel pressure to drink to avoid a sense of isolation and to be accepted as part of a working group. For women who are susceptible to problems

with alcohol, there are frequent opportunities to develop them.

A taboo against drunkenness in women has persisted for centuries, as has a penchant to stigmatize and punish women for hard drinking. If a drinking woman gets loud or talkative, if she slurs her words, her behavior flies in the face of traditional views of femininity. Because women have been held to a higher standard, a professional woman who drinks too much is more conspicuous than her male counterparts. Men may see her as a mark for easy sex and, in general, people have been apt to respond with contempt, disgust, and reproach. The shame engendered by these responses may account, in large part, for the fact that high-status women with alcohol problems have been four times more likely than high-status men to leave their jobs.

Small changes for the better are beginning to appear, especially among younger professional women. With the recognition that early intervention is much less expensive than treatment of an advanced problem, early detection of alcohol problems is being emphasized. Hopeful for women with drinking problems, there is a new level of concern about excessive drinking. It is beginning to be seen as a cry for help. This more caring view is combined with a greater awareness that help is available and that well-conducted treatment works. Perhaps as a result, more women with alcohol problems are staying at work and their enlightened colleagues are more likely to support them to get help.

— Susan F. Walsh, Ph.D.

What Is Safe Drinking?

Experts recommend no more than one drink per day for women, a level usually not associated with health risks. This is half the quantity recommended for men.

A drink is defined as:

- One 12-ounce bottle of beer
- One 5-ounce glass of wine
- 1.5 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits

Alcohol and Women's Health

Most of the harmful effects of alcohol come from drinking too much.

Alcohol related health risks include:

- Liver damage
- Brain damage
- Breast Cancer
- Menstrual problems
- Heart damage and hypertension
- Harmful alcohol/medication interactions
- During pregnancy, fetal alcohol syndrome

How to Reduce Alcohol's Negative Effects

- Limit yourself to one drink an hour
- Eat first – not just while drinking – foods with protein work best
- Drink slowly – alternating with non-alcoholic drinks
- Establish your own safe limit and stick to it
- Don't drink and drive

Scientific Recovery

Scientific Recovery is an evidence-based treatment program for women seeking state-of-the-art, individual therapy for problem drinking. Our focus is on professional women who have recognized that alcohol is a problem they no longer want in their lives. Our goal is to assist women not only to eliminate their alcohol dependence, but also to be happy that they did.



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