

Test your knowledge

General practitioners are in an excellent position to detect alcohol abuse and to intervene to prevent physical, psychological and social effects. Despite general pessimism about the treatment of alcohol dependence, there is good evidence that clear advice about excessive drinking does have an effect. There are also new drugs on the PBS that have been shown to help some people keep sober.

The multiple choice questions in this quiz may have more than one correct answer.

- Alcohol intake is expressed in terms of 'standard drinks'. Which of the following are examples of a standard drink?
 - one schooner of full-strength beer
 - 250 mL of wine
 - 120 mL of wine
 - 60 mL of 90-proof spirits
 - one middy of full-strength beer
- What is regarded as a moderate daily intake of alcohol for a man?
 - one standard drink
 - two standard drinks
 - three standard drinks
 - four standard drinks
 - between five and seven standard drinks
- What is regarded as a moderate daily intake of alcohol for a woman?
 - one standard drink
 - two standard drinks
 - three standard drinks
 - four standard drinks
 - between five and seven standard drinks
- Which of the following are thought to be responsible for the difference in the ability of men and women to tolerate alcohol?
 - variation in body mass only – a man and a woman of equal body mass will have identical responses to a specified amount of alcohol
 - variation in gastric alcohol dehydrogenase – the enzyme is thought to be less potent in women; therefore, women break down less alcohol and their blood alcohol levels are higher
 - differences in total body water (women have less than men)
 - nothing – there is no difference in the ability of men and women to tolerate alcohol
 - different levels of liver enzyme induction – women tend to drink less than men, and so their liver enzymes are less induced, resulting in higher blood levels of alcohol
- Liver function tests are not always abnormal in people who are drinking too much, but certain patterns are typical. Which of the following is the most typical pattern of abnormality in alcoholic liver disease? (The liver function tests not mentioned in each option are normal.)
 - elevated alkaline phosphatase and gamma glutamyl transferase
 - elevated gamma glutamyl transferase, aspartate aminotransferase and alanine aminotransferase (with aspartate aminotransferase elevated more than alanine aminotransferase)
 - elevated bilirubin (in isolation)
 - elevated aspartate aminotransferase, alanine aminotransferase and bilirubin
 - elevated bilirubin and alkaline phosphatase
- Excessive alcohol can cause changes in the blood film. What should make you suspect that alcohol is the cause?
 - microcytic hypochromic anaemia
 - macrocytic red blood cells
 - sideroblastic anaemia
 - thrombocytosis
 - an elevated white cell count
- Alcohol dependent people are frequently malnourished, partly because so much of their energy is supplied by alcohol. What are typical deficiencies in the diet of a person who is consuming too much alcohol?
 - folate
 - thiamine
 - vitamin B₁₂
 - iron
 - calcium
- Which of the following drugs are approved in Australia for the treatment of alcohol abuse?
 - disulfiram
 - naltrexone
 - acamprosate
 - vitamin B₁₂ injections
 - diazepam.



Figure. Calcification in the pancreatic tail, associated with a pseudocyst, caused by excessive alcohol intake over many years.

Reference

- Swift RM. Drug therapy for alcohol dependence. *N Engl J Med* 1999; 340: 1482-1490.

Answers appear on page 171

Clinical quiz answers

(to questions on page 139)

1. c, e

A standard drink contains between 8 and 10 g of alcohol, and is a smaller volume than many people commonly drink. Examples of a standard drink include 120 mL of wine, and one middy of full-strength beer (285 mL) or two middies of light beer (2.2% alcohol).

2. b

Two standard drinks per day is regarded as moderate drinking for a man.

3. a

One standard drink per day is regarded as moderate drinking for a woman.

4. b, c

Women develop higher blood alcohol levels than men for an equivalent amount of alcohol. Likely reasons for this are a lower total body water in women, and less potent gastric alcohol dehydrogenase (although there is some debate about the latter reason).

5. b

The most typical pattern of abnormality in alcoholic hepatitis is: elevated gamma glutamyl transferase, aspartate aminotransferase and alanine aminotransferase (with aspartate aminotransferase elevated more than alanine aminotransferase). An isolated elevated bilirubin is likely to be due to Gilbert's syndrome.

6. b, c

Alcohol can have a direct toxic effect on the bone marrow. Typical abnormalities are macrocytic red blood cells and (less commonly) a sideroblastic anaemia.

7. a, b

Folate and thiamine are frequently inadequate in the diet of a person who is consuming too much alcohol.

8. a, b, c

There are three drugs available in Australia for the treatment of alcohol abuse: disulfiram, naltrexone and acamprosate. Disulfiram causes an accumulation of acetaldehyde that causes people who drink to suffer nausea and vomiting. Naltrexone appears to reduce the pleasurable feeling associated with drinking, and acamprosate reduces cravings for alcohol. Each of these drugs should be used in the context of further assessment and counselling.

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