Craving alcohol after blackout? [1]

Dear Alice,

I recently had a very bad experience with alcohol poisoning where I blacked out for several hours and had a horrible hangover the next day. Many of my friends told me that when they had blacked out or even just gotten sick from alcohol, they did not want to drink again for weeks or months. One friend even stopped drinking altogether from such an experience. I am worried, though, because it is only one week after my terrifying experience and I am already craving alcohol again. Why hasn't my horrible experience turned me off to alcohol, while the day after, I swore I would never drink again because it had been sooo scary? I cannot be an alcoholic, because I only started drinking two months ago. What is wrong with me?

Sincerely,
Unchanged by Poisoning

Answer

Dear Unchanged by Poisoning,

Two parts horrible hangover and three parts scary blackout is enough to shake up most people to consider swearing off alcohol. Remember, though, that alcohol use exists on a continuum from complete abstinence to occasional use to dependence. It may make sense to look into what this experience means to you and which direction you want to move forward with alcohol, if any at all, in your life.

Alcohol may be dangerous, especially when a large amount is consumed over a short period of time, leading to drunkenness, feelings of nausea, vomiting, and even blacking out. In severe cases, people may experience alcohol poisoning, stop breathing, and possibly die. It's important to clarify what you are trying to describe by saying that you blacked out. Many people confuse the terms "blacking out" and "passing out." Blacking out [2] happens when you do not remember all or part of what happens (like full or partial amnesia) while you are drunk. On the outside, you may appear "just drunk." Passing out means you become physically unconscious, which is medically dangerous. The sight of an unconscious person is usually evident to other people.

On the flip side, alcohol may be enjoyed without it turning into a problem. In fact, some studies show health benefits to drinking moderate amounts of alcohol. For many people who have experienced something unpleasant while drinking, the incident serves as motivation to stay tuned to their limits. Reading Hangover helper? and tips for healthy drinking [3] may give you...
some ideas for moderation.

If you are concerned that you are "already craving alcohol again," it may make sense to look a little deeper. Consider:

- What do you mean when you describe your attitude towards alcohol as "craving?"
- What are the reasons you drink?
- When you drink, what do you hope will be the result?
- How does drinking affect your behavior? Your feelings about yourself? Your interactions with other people?

Perhaps you are actually craving the feelings that you attach with drinking, such as relaxation, escape from everyday problems, or fun with friends. Reading Trouble controlling my drinking [4] may also give you additional things to consider.

For additional information and resources, you might check out the Rethinking Drinking: Alcohol and Your Health website [5] from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA).

You have stayed in tune with your health in realizing that you're "craving alcohol." Noticing these changes and acting upon them appropriately, perhaps first re-evaluating your relationship with, with less, or without alcohol, will help you to maintain and improve your health. Change may happen slowly, but it seems like you're looking into a brighter direction free of blackouts!

Alice!

Category:
Alcohol & Other Drugs [6]
Alcohol [7]

Related questions

Alcohol habit forming? [8]
Trouble controlling my drinking [9]
How much alcohol a day? [10]
Suddenly, drinking alcohol makes me sick! [11]
Mixing alcohol with energy drinks? safe or risky? [12]
21st birthday coming up? Should I drink? [13]

Resources

Columbia Health BASICS program (Morningside) [14]
Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) (Morningside) [15]
Student Health Service BASICS program (CUMC) [16]
Mental Health Service (CUMC) [17]
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