Dear Alice,

What kind of alcohol is habit forming?

? Drinker

Answer

Dear Drinker,

Wine. Beer. A vodka martini with extra olives, shaken, not stirred. Each person may have different preferences when it comes to alcoholic beverages, but what all types of alcohol have in common is that when consumed in excess, any may become habit forming (addictive).

Alcohol dependence (a.k.a., alcoholism) is characterized by an intense craving for alcohol, despite recognizing that alcohol use may be destructive to the people drinking it and to their family and friends. Similar to those who are addicted to drugs, those who are dependent on alcohol develop a tolerance to it, meaning that they need to consume more and more of the alcohol to achieve the desired feelings. In addition to tolerance, other signs of alcohol dependence include:

- A strong need, or craving, to drink alcohol
- Inability to limit the quantity of alcohol consumed on any given occasion
- Physical dependence, characterized by withdrawal symptoms when a person stops drinking after a period of drinking quite heavily (FYI, check out Alcohol withdrawal symptoms)

Alcohol dependence differs from alcohol abuse, which is characterized by excessive alcohol consumption, without a physical dependency on alcohol. However, if someone abuses alcohol for an extended period of time, s/he may become alcohol dependent. The likelihood of becoming dependent on alcohol may be genetic: people who have alcohol dependent family members have a greater likelihood of becoming alcohol dependent themselves, if put in similar drinking situations. Excessive drinking, no matter what you call it, may result in a destructive pattern of poor judgment, affect families and friendships, and may even have legal consequences. For more information on alcohol dependence and abuse, you may want to check out the responses in the Go Ask Alice! Alcohol and Other Drugs archives.
Cheers to moderate consumption of your preferred beverage!

Alice!
Category:
Alcohol & Other Drugs [4]
Alcohol [5]

Related questions

Drinking addiction: Psychological or physical? [6]
Avoid hangover? [7]
Can I drink alcohol after vaccination? [8]
I’m sure I was drunk, but I’m not sure if I had sex [9]
Suddenly, drinking alcohol makes me sick! [10]
Better to have one alcoholic drink every day or many at one time infrequently? [11]

Resources

Anonymous Alcohol Self-Assessment [12]
Medical Services (Morningside) [13]
Medical Services (CUMC) [14]

Published date:
Apr 30, 1994
Last reviewed on:
Jul 26, 2015

Go Ask Alice! is not an emergency or instant response service.

If you are in an urgent situation, please visit our Emergency page to view a list of 24 hour support services and hotlines.

Source URL: http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/alcohol-habit-forming

Links