

ALCOHOL AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE EDUCATION PROGRAM**STUDY MATERIAL****SECTION 8****ALCOHOL AND THE NERVOUS SYSTEM****INSTRUCTIONS**

This is the eighth part in a series of 14 lessons covering study material on alcohol abuse, alcoholics, alcoholism and substance (drug) abuse. **This Section covers the problems that alcohol causes your nervous system. You will find this Section's study material divided into many "subsections" for easier understanding.**

After you read and study the material in the first subsection, answer that subsection's study questions. Once you have mastered one subsection, you may then go on to the next. Before you try to answer any study questions, you should understand these guidelines. They will help you when answering the study questions:

1. Some questions need to have a complete statement for the answer.
2. Other questions require a True or False, or a Yes or No answer.
3. When answering any "fill-in" questions, remember that a blank may stand for just one (1) word, for a few words (2 or 3), or for even part of a sentence (4 or more words).
4. When study questions offer you from 2 to 6 possible answers (these are called "multiple choice"), only **one** of the answers given will be correct.
5. There are no "trick" questions. All answers will be found easily in the appropriate study material.

Do **not** write in, fold or otherwise mutilate this booklet. Other people are going to be using it after you. You must return it in good condition before you will be issued a test.

Are you an alcoholic? By this time you should have a good idea whether or not you have problems with alcohol. Here is a checklist to help you decide. Answer yes or no to these questions. Remember that if you do not tell yourself the truth, the person you will hurt the most is yourself.

EARLY SYMPTOMS:(The first stage of alcoholism often occurs over 5 to 10 years.).

1. Do you lie or feel guilty about your drinking?
2. Do you hide the amount you drink from other people?
3. Do you gulp your drinks, often drinking hard and fast?
4. Do you usually have a few extra drinks early in the day especially when you know that later in the evening you will be going where people will be drinking, such as to a party?
5. Do you always drink at certain specific times, such as during cocktail hour, after a fight or before a big meeting?
6. Do you drink when you are tired, or when feeling low, upset or worried?
7. Do you resent your family and friends talking about your drinking?
8. Have you started having blackouts or do you drink until you pass out?

MIDDLE SYMPTOMS:(Usually last from 2 to 5 years.).

1. Are you **lying** more about your drinking and making promises you can't keep (such as about slowing down or quitting)?
2. Do you find yourself needing a drink more often?
3. When sober, are you sorry for what you have said or done while drinking?
4. When you do drink, do you drink alone more often and keep away from your family or friends?
5. Do you go on weekend drinking "benders" and the experience Monday morning hangovers?
6. Have you been "going on the wagon" to control your drinking?
7. Are you passing out or blacking out from drinking more alcohol more often than you used to?

LATE SYMPTOMS:(The last and worst stage of alcoholism.).

1. Do you live to drink and drink to live? (Is alcohol the only real interest you have in life?)

2. Are you clearly drunk at times when it is very important for you to be sober, such as at a meeting with your boss?
3. Do your drinking sprees last for several days?
4. Do you sometimes have the shakes in the morning and find it helps to take a quick drink?
5. Do you experience blackouts and pass out more often now?
6. Have you lost interest in your family, friends and other people around you?

The more times you answered "yes" to any of these questions, the more likely it is that you are an alcoholic. But, no matter how bad your problem is, or what stage you are in, you **can** recover from alcoholism if you want to bad enough. Do you want to? This may seem like a foolish question, for no one in his right mind **would really** want to be an alcoholic. But, you must seriously think about what it means to stop drinking.

First you must realize and **admit** that you are an alcoholic and that you cannot control alcohol. If you do not admit this, you cannot help yourself out of alcoholism. You must also understand and accept the fact that the only way to stop being a alcoholic is to **stop drinking**. This means you can never again take another drink for the rest of your life (Gorski, T., 1986, *Staying Sober*, pages 34-51).

You have most likely used alcohol in the past, especially when things were going wrong. A few drinks might have made you feel better or more relaxed, and made everything appear rosy.

But, if you are an alcoholic, you are most likely beyond having just a few drinks, and you can probably remember times when alcohol messed up your life (Gorski, T., 1986, *Staying Sober*, page 39).

There is no such thing as a "cured" alcoholic. If you are an alcoholic, then no matter how long you go without alcohol even if you have been dry for years - if you start drinking again, you'll be right back in trouble.

In other words, you are an alcoholic for the rest of your life, whether you drink again or not (Gorski, T., 1986, *Staying Sober*, page 45).

The biggest problem that most alcoholics face is deciding whether or not they actually are alcoholics. One of the biggest symptoms of alcoholism is denial. Denial is working hard to convince yourself that there is not a problem (Gorski, T., 1986, *Staying Sober*, page 48/49). Alcoholics must understand that they have an illness that is interfering with their ability to productive Human Beings (Gorski, T., 1986, *Staying Sober*, page 83). When problems do start coming up, drinkers do not want to put the blame on alcoholism. They find it more convenient

to blame their problems on almost anything else other than the alcohol. Despite the strong denial that alcoholics cling to keep from facing their problems, there are some signs that are dead giveaways that an alcoholic process is going on. One of the first symptoms beside denial is the occurrence of blackouts. Denial of how important alcohol is in the life of a drinker is the first big one. The next biggest indicator is the blackout. If you have blacked out or passed out directly due to drinking too much alcohol, this is a serious sign that you are abusing alcohol and may be having trouble with alcohol and possibly alcoholism. A blackout is where you do not remember what happened while you were drinking. Other people who were around you while you were drinking tell you stories about what you did, but you do not remember. One theory indicates that blackouts occur because alcohol slowly burns the oxygen in your body and does not leave enough for the brain. The brain does not work right when it does not have enough oxygen, and consequently, you have blackouts or memory lapses. Blackouts are a serious sign that you are having problems with alcohol (Gorski, T., 1986, *Staying Sober*, pages 46-81), (South Eastern School for Alcohol Studies, 1990).

Another method of figuring out if you have a problem is to take a look at how important alcohol is to you. In order to do this you need to voluntarily stay away from alcohol for a few months. This will allow you to see for yourself how much of a pull alcohol actually has on you. To use this test correctly however, you cannot fool yourself into thinking that you can stop whenever you want to, but you just don't want to. Just stop and watch what happens, just like you are doing an experiment and watching someone else. The more you want to drink, the more excuses you make so that you can drink. The more dependent you are on this drug, the more dangerous is your situation (Gorski, T., 1986, *Staying Sober*, page 88/89).

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The first thing you need to do in order to recover is to _____ you are _____.
2. Do you think you are an alcoholic? Why or why not?
3. The only way to stop having problems with alcohol is to _____.
4. If you are an alcoholic, can you remember times when alcohol _____ your life?
5. There is no such thing as a _____ alcoholic.
6. During the late stage of alcoholism, an alcoholic will:

The idea of spending the rest of your life without alcohol may seem awful and unfair, but it can be done. After all, there are many diabetics who learn to live with little or no sugar. And there are many fat people who learn to eat sensibly or diet for the rest of their lives. But, even

more important and significant to you is that there are many recovering alcoholics who are happy, useful, living people because they have learned to live **without** alcohol (Gorski, T., 1986, *Staying Sober*, pages 88/89).

Don't worry about the rest of your life all at once. Take life one day at a time. Do not forget that you are doing something important for yourself by learning to live without alcohol. Your ability to get better may also help your family, friends and other people; but, in order to recover, you must remember that you are doing this for **yourself** (Kinney, J., Leaton, G., 1987, *Loosening the Grip*, page 206).

No doubt you have made promises about drinking to yourself and to other people in the past; however, how many of those promises did you keep? Few or none? Then this is why you must decide for yourself. In the past, you were probably selfish because of your alcoholic ways. Now it is time to be selfish in order to stop yourself from drinking alcohol ever again (Gorski, T., 1986, *Staying Sober*, page 50).

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. There are many recovering _____ who are happy, useful, loving people because they have learned to _____.

STUDY QUESTIONS

2. Instead of worrying about the rest of your life all at once, is best to take life _____.
3. Whom are you doing good for when you learn to live without _____?
4. In the past, you have probably been selfish because of your alcoholic ways. Now it is time to be selfish in order to _____ from _____ drinking alcohol - ever again.

There are some ideas that can help you start changing your way of life. They might be called "THE SURVIVAL KIT". They come in two groups: one group is for the **first few days** of going without alcohol, while the other group is to help you through the **rest of your life** (Many of the ideas fit into both groups) (Gorski, T., 1986, *Staying Sober*, pages 52-53).

I.

**IDEAS FOR THE FIRST FEW DAYS
(WHILE YOU`RE AT HOME)**

LOOKING BETTER WILL HELP YOU FEEL BETTER. - You may wake up from a hangover feeling awful. The face you see in the mirror may be even worse. You may believe that you are too ill and too shaky to do anything about the way you look. But, the **effort** is what counts. Take a bath and wear something that is casual and looks good on you. It's easier to like yourself and believe you are worth something without alcohol if you know you look better.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The survival kit consists of two groups, one for the _____ of going without _____ and the second is to help you through _____.
2. _____ better will help you _____ better.
3. You may believe that you are too ill and too shaky to do anything about the way you look, but the _____ is what counts.

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. It's easier to believe you are worth something without alcohol if _____.

II.

TRY TO EAT SOMETHING. - You may feel too sick to eat if you have just gone through a drinking spree. But you need the nutrition that wholesome food will give you. Many alcoholics have not eaten good meals over the years because all they wanted to do was drink. This can badly affect a person's health. If it has been awhile since you had a good meal, it is very important for you to learn how to eat again. Alcohol contains no appreciable quantity of vitamins and minerals; therefore, you must eat nutritious foods daily to help your recovery (Gorski, T., *Staying Sober*, 1986, *Staying Sober*, page 73).

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the second idea of the "survival kit"?
2. If it has been awhile since you had a good meal, it is very important for you to _____ .

III.

If you want to tell someone about how bad you feel, do so, but remember not to claim that things are any worse than they really are. Talk about what you are experiencing more than your due, find someone who won't accuse, criticize, or minimize what you are experiencing (Gorski, T., 1986, Staying Sober, page 71).

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Alcoholics make noise about how bad they feel so people will _____ to them.
2. Don't complain about the way you feel any _____ .

IV.

DON'T FIGHT WITH ANYONE ABOUT ANYTHING. - This doesn't mean that you should never argue with anyone again. But, for the first few days after a fight you need to be extra careful not to get to the point where you may want a drink to feel better. It is hard to avoid fighting when you think someone has been unfair to you. While it may hurt your pride not to fight (Gorski, T., 1986, Staying Sober, pages 77/78) remember that staying off alcohol is more important to your life right now than having the last word. Of course, you still need to find a sensible way to let off steam. You might take a walk, go see a movie, try a sport such as golf...or just clean out the garage or do any other chore requiring physical exercise (Gorski, T., 1986, Staying Sober, page 76).

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the fourth idea of the "survival kit"?
2. Staying off alcohol is more important than _____ .

3. For the first few days after a fight you need to be careful about getting to the point where _____.

V.

IF YOU FEEL NERVOUS OR EDGY, DO SOMETHING YOU DO WELL AND EASILY. - You may start feeling jumpy if you have time on your hands that you used to spend drinking. If you need to find something to do to take your mind off alcohol, do something easy like exercise (Gorski, T., 1986, *Staying Sober*, pages 76/77).

Maybe just taking a walk will help. If you like to read, try a book that's easy to understand. It is important not to let yourself get too **tired**, because, if you do you may wind up drinking again. So, for these first few days, don't start out doing something that takes a lot of time or energy. On the other hand, don't just sit around either. There are many things you can do to reduce stress. Listening to music, reading, exercise and massage are all ways of reducing stress (Gorski, T., 1986, *Staying Sober*, page 77).

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. If you feel nervous or edgy, it may be a good idea to do something that is _____ to do.
2. It is important not to let yourself get _____, because if you do, you may wind up drinking again.

VI.

DO NOT HANG AROUND THE PEOPLE YOU DRINK WITH FOR AWHILE. - This does not mean that you should never see your old friends again. But you DON'T need to be around people who will encourage you to take that first drink. Stay away from such friends until you are strong enough to stand up to their teasing and still say "no" to drinking. If you think there's ANY danger of anyone talking you into taking even one drink or doing drugs, avoid them until you feel stronger. If friends get upset because you won't drink with them, then maybe it's time for you to look for new friends (Nakken, C., 1988, *Addictive Personality*, page 43).

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. For awhile, don't hang around the people you used to _____.

2. If you think there's any danger of your old friends talking you into having a drink, you should _____ until you feel stronger.

VII.

REMEMBER THAT YOU ARE NOT THE FIRST PERSON TO GO THROUGH ALL THIS. -

There are plenty of recovered alcoholics and former drug addicts who know what you're going through because they've been there. If you know anyone like that, get in touch with him. This will help you begin positively, interacting with others again (Nakken, C., 1988, page 21).

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the seventh idea of the "survival kit"?

STUDY QUESTIONS

2. Recovered alcoholics and former drug addicts know what you are going through because they have _____.
3. Should you avoid all recovered alcoholics and former drug addicts?

IDEAS FOR THE FIRST FEW DAYS AT WORK

1. **DURING THE DAY STAY AWAY FROM THOSE PEOPLE WITH WHOM YOU USUALLY HAD A DRINK OR DID DRUGS.**

If you usually drink with someone at lunch, try eating somewhere else, or with someone else. When you become stronger as a **nondrinker**, (which may take years) it won't bother you to be with people who are drinking or doing drugs; however, do not tempt yourself at first.

2. **DO NOT ARGUE WITH ANYONE AT WORK OR AT HOME.**
3. **GO HOME AFTER YOU GET OFF WORK.** - If you usually have a cocktail before dinner, try having a Coke or some coffee. During the first few days of learning to live without alcohol you should stay away from places where you would be tempted to drink.
4. **TAKE A HOT BATH OR SHOWER AND GO TO BED EARLY.** - Remember you need to keep from getting too tired. Besides, you probably haven't been keeping regular

sleeping hours, and you need to establish and maintain good sleeping habits. You can also use other diversions to deal with stress. You can take a walk, take a bubble bath, get a massage or talk with a friend. Do not bite off more than you can chew (Gorski, T., 1986, *Staying Sober*, page 77).

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. If you usually drink with someone at lunch, try eating _____ or with _____.
2. Do not _____ with anyone at work or at home.
3. For the first few days, after you get off work you should _____ places where _____ is served.

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. Since you most likely have not maintained regular sleeping hours, you need to _____.
5. During recovery, after you get off work you should: _____

HERE ARE A FEW MORE IDEAS ON HOW TO GET THROUGH THE FIRST DAYS OF LIVING WITHOUT DRUGS OR ALCOHOL.

- A. **REMEMBER THAT YOU HAVE A DISEASE, NOT A MORAL PROBLEM.** - Don't feel **ashamed** of realizing that you can't handle alcohol. If you don't think you should drink, you have every right not to have any alcohol or drugs, no matter what other people say. Instead of viewing yourself as a bad person you need to see yourself as a person with an illness that can't be cured (Nakken, C., 1988, *The Addictive Personality*, page 108).
- B. **BE READY TO REFUSE A DRINK.** - It is all right to make up an excuse for not drinking. If other people bug you too much about refusing alcohol, it may be best to leave, or tell them the truth...that alcohol is a danger to you. Recovering substance abusers need to be very clear and specific and totally honest when deciding what is addictive behavior (Nakken, C., 1988, *The Addictive Personality*, page 105.).

One recovered alcoholic said that she found that if she offered to buy a round of drinks for everyone, few people cared if she drank or not. By the time it was their turn to buy a round, they were glad she was drinking something cheap and nonalcoholic, like juice, ginger ale or

club soda. Of course, you may not be able to afford to buy a round of drinks for others; but, if you think long enough, you probably can come up with some way to keep most people off your back about drinking.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Remember that you have a _____, not a _____ problem.
2. Alcoholics shouldn't feel _____ of realizing they can't handle alcohol.
3. To keep people from bugging you, you may tell them the truth...that alcohol is a _____ to you.

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. **AVOID MAKING EXCUSES FOR YOURSELF.** You may excuse yourself right back into drinking if you let yourself get away with it. Two very dangerous excuses are:
 1. "Since I'm sick and I'm an alcoholic, I need to drink so I can keep going". You'll keep on being sick if you tell yourself that.
 2. Alcoholics often blame everything in the world except alcohol for their problem. Make sure you know that liquor has messed up your life and you just cannot handle it.

In order to recover from an addiction the addict must admit ones powerless over it. Recovery is a process of surrender (Nakken, C., 1988, The Addictive Personality, page 106.).

- C. LIVE ONE DAY AT A TIME WITHOUT ALCOHOL OR DRUGS.** - Don't worry about staying off alcohol for the rest of your life. Just think about recovering from alcoholism today, or one day at a time.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What are two very dangerous excuses alcoholics use to keep on drinking?
 - (a) _____.
 - (b) _____.
2. Remember to live _____ without alcohol.

3. Alcoholics may tell themselves, "Since I'm sick and I am an alcoholic, I need to _____ so I can keep going.

REFERENCES:

Gorski, T., 1986, Staying Sober.

Kinney, J., & Leaton, G., 1987, Loosening the Grip: An handbook that contains the basic information an alcohol counselor, or other professional confronted with alcohol needs to know and would like to have handy. C.V. Mosby Co. St. Louis, Missouri 63146.

Nakken, C., 1988, The Addictive Personality: This book is written to help its readers better understand the process of addiction and the development of an addictive personality. Hazelden, St. Paul, Minnesota.