Alcohol and Your Body

Synopsis

Alcohol is the most widely abused drug in the world, and its effects on the human body are serious. Society and the companies that manufacture alcoholic beverages promote drinking as a harmless social activity. The reality, as presented in this program, is dramatically different. Alcohol affects every system of the body and even moderate consumption can have serious effects.

This program describes how the toxic effects of alcohol impact the nervous, circulatory, digestive, urinary, reproductive and muscular/skeletal systems of the human body. Specific disorders, such as alcoholic pancreatitis, cirrhosis of the liver, and fetal alcohol syndrome are described. The program also includes new information about the genetic basis of alcohol addiction, presented by Dr. Ernest P. Noble, a pioneering genetic researcher at the University of California, Los Angeles. The role alcohol consumption plays in the development of several common cancers is also revealed.

In candid interviews, several recovering alcoholics share their experiences with alcohol and describe how the pressure to drink started early in life. The program utilizes dozens of full-color medical graphics and slides to demonstrate where specific organs of the body are located and how they are damaged by alcohol consumption. The medical information in this program has been authenticated by some of the top health care providers and researchers in the field, several of whom appear on the program.

Questions to ask before viewing

1. Is drinking alcohol a harmless activity? (Yes. Alcohol begins to affect your body with the first sip. To our bodies, alcohol is a toxin.)
2. Can you identify the systems of the body that are affected by alcohol? (Every system: nervous, circulatory, digestive, urinary, muscular/skeletal, and reproductive system.)
3. Is drinking a problem for society? (Yes. Studies indicate that alcohol is involved in 50% of all spousal abuse cases and 40% of all child abuse cases. The leading cause of death among 15 to 24-year-olds is alcohol related traffic accidents.)
4. What is the definition of alcoholism? (The addictive use of alcohol, especially when it interferes with physical and mental health.)
5. Is there a test to determine who will become an alcoholic? (There is no test, but studies have found that children of alcoholics are at greatest risk of becoming alcoholics themselves. There is a genetic predisposition to alcoholism.)
6. Why do people start drinking? (Peer pressure, the need for acceptance.)
7. What role does advertising play in our perception of alcohol? (The companies that make alcoholic beverages promote drinking as a harmless social activity. Advertisements do not give a true picture of the risks of drinking alcohol.)
8. Is alcohol a stimulant or a depressant? (Contrary to popular opinion, it is a depressant.)

Questions to ask after viewing

1. What organs of the body are most affected by alcohol? (The brain. Alcohol poisons the brain, killing brain cells. Alcohol consumption impairs reasoning, self-restraint and judgment and can lead to even more serious hallucinations.)
2. How does alcohol increase your chance of having a stroke? (Alcohol causes chemical changes in the blood and raises blood pressure to unsafe levels. Alcohol also increases the level of triglycerides in the blood. These fatty substances clog arteries.)
3. What causes a "beer belly?" (Alcohol slows down the body's metabolism of fat by up to 36%).
4. Why is a healthy liver important? (The liver filters out poisons and helps process everything we eat. A damaged liver upsets the body's entire digestive process.)
5. How can alcohol consumption affect the kidneys? (The kidneys can become inflamed and begin to store excessive amounts of fat. Damaged kidneys filter the blood improperly.)
6. Can alcohol damage your bones? (Yes. Alcohol depletes the body of calcium, the chief building block of bones. Bones can become weak and brittle.)
7. Can pregnancy be complicated by drinking alcohol? (Yes. Pregnant women who drink often have a difficult labor and delivery and have more stillbirths than non-drinkers.)
8. If a pregnant woman drinks, can the alcohol affect the fetus? (Yes. The alcohol flows through the mother's bloodstream to the fetus in the same concentration as in the mother. The result can be fetal alcohol syndrome.)
9. What can happen if you combine drinking and smoking cigarettes? (You can increase your
chance of getting cancer of the mouth, throat, esophagus and windpipe.)

10. What role does genetics play in alcohol addiction? (There is a specific gene that researchers believe puts some people at higher risk for becoming alcoholics. This gene is most often found in the children of alcoholics. But since there is no test for determining who will become an alcoholic, many experts advise people not to drink at all, regardless of family history.)

Additional activities

- Discuss some of the ways to combat social pressures to drink.
- Look at advertisements for alcoholic beverages and discuss what images they project and what information they hide.
- Design an advertisement for alcohol that tells only the truth about how alcohol affects the body.
- List some healthy substitutes or alcoholic beverages.
- Discuss how different families have different attitudes toward alcohol.

Additional AIMS Media titles

Drugs and Human Physiology series
Drugs, Alcohol, and Your Body
Drugs: How They Affect Body Chemistry

- Length
  29 Minutes

- Audience Levels
  Senior High-Adult

- Subject Areas
  Substance Abuse

- Catalog number
  8759

Annotation

To the human body, alcohol is a toxin. Even in moderate amounts, alcohol seriously impacts virtually every system of the body. This program traces the effects of alcohol on the body and describes specific disorders that result from alcohol consumption.

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Objectives

- To describe how alcohol affects every system of the human body
- To identify the major physical disorders that are caused by alcohol
- To discuss the role genetics plays in determining who is at risk for alcohol addiction
- To examine the link between alcohol consumption and cancer
- To describe the cause and effects of fetal alcohol syndrome