

# ADVANTAGE

## Alcohol Abuse



December | 2015

Alcohol abuse means having unhealthy or dangerous drinking habits, such as drinking every day or drinking too much at a time.

### How much is too much?



A woman who has more than three drinks at one time or more than 7 drinks a week.



A man who has more than four drinks at one time or more than 14 drinks a week.

### What are the signs?



Being drunk often for long periods of time.



Not remembering what you did while you were drinking (blackouts).



Feeling guilty after drinking.



Making excuses for your drinking or doing things to hide your drinking.



Worrying that you won't get enough alcohol for an evening or weekend.

### Diagnoses and treatment



Routine doctor visit



Mental health assessment checks



Further investigations and tests will be performed depending on the findings of the examinations.



## Questions

for Dr Thapelo Motshudi

#### 1 How much is too much?

Alcohol is part of many people's lives and has a place in cultural and family traditions. It can sometimes be hard to know when you begin to drink too much, especially when one lives in a society that encourages heavy drinking by treating those who drink excessively as heroes. You are at risk of drinking too much and should talk to your doctor if you are:

- A woman who has more than 3 drinks at one time or more than 7 drinks a week. A standard drink is one can of beer, 1 glass of wine, or 1 mixed drink.
- A man who has more than 4 drinks at one time or more than 14 drinks a week.

#### 2 What are the signs of alcohol abuse?

- Drinking in the morning, being drunk often for long periods of time, or drinking alone.
- Changing what you drink, such as switching from beer to wine because you think it will help you drink less.
- Feeling guilty after drinking. Making excuses for your drinking or doing things to hide your drinking, such as buying alcohol at different stores.
- Not remembering what you did while you were drinking (blackouts).
- Worrying that you won't get enough alcohol for an evening or weekend.

#### 3 How are alcohol problems diagnosed?

- Alcohol problems may be diagnosed at a routine doctor visit .
- If a partner or friend thinks you have an alcohol problem, he or she may urge you to see your doctor.
- Once your doctor suspects that you might have an alcohol problem, he will take a detailed medical history, and perform physical and mental health assessments. The mental health assessment checks to see whether you may have a mental health problem, such as depression, which may be a cause of the problem.
- Further investigations and tests will be performed depending on the findings of the above examinations.

#### 4 What can you do if you or another person has a problem with alcohol?

If you feel you have an alcohol problem, get help. Even if you are successful in other areas of your life, visit a doctor or go to a self-help group. The earlier you get help, the easier it will be to cut back or quit.

Helping someone with an alcohol problem is hard. If you're covering for the person, you need to stop. For example, don't make excuses for the person when he or she misses work, because your loyalty in this case does more harm than good.

You may be able to help by talking to the person about what his or her drinking does to you and others. Talk to the person in private, when the person is not using alcohol, and when you are both calm. If the person agrees to get help, call for an appointment right away. Don't wait.