The Rise Of Alcohol Use During COVID-19: An Epidemic In Plain Sight

Ruby Mehta, Tempest
TEMPEST

PRESENTS:

The Rise of Alcohol Use in COVID: an Epidemic in Plain Sight
TEMPEST PROVIDES A NO-SHAME, LABELS-OPTIONAL APPROACH TO QUITTING DRINKING
AGENDA

→ What is excessive alcohol use?

→ Root causes of excessive use

→ A holistic approach to recovery
LET’S START WITH A STORY

“I woke up hungover again”
“I promised myself I wouldn’t do this again”
“I can’t remember what I said last night…”
“Did I embarrass myself?”
“How much did I spend?”
“I wonder if I have a problem with alcohol”
“If I had a problem, where could I go for help?”
MANY PEOPLE STRUGGLE WITH EXCESSIVE DRINKING - AND DON’T KNOW WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

51M Americans meet the criteria for problematic alcohol use - and most do not get care

2% In treatment

29% Untreated AUD

69% Untreated problematic drinking

10 Years The average time it takes from onset of alcohol abuse to seeking any treatment, if at all

PERCENT OF TEMPEST MEMBERS WHO TRIED ADDITIONAL SERVICES

- IOP: 8.1%
- Inpatient: 9.5%
- Therapy: 44.7%
- AA: 7
tried but not for them 30

TEMPEST
WHAT IS EXCESSIVE ALCOHOL USE?

Excessive alcohol use includes:
- Binge drinking (4-5 drinks on an occasion),
- Heavy drinking
- Alcohol use by pregnant women
- Alcohol use under 21.

CDC estimates that 1 in 6 US adults binge drink about once a week, consuming an average of 7 drinks per binge.

Excessive alcohol use is responsible for about 95,000 deaths a year in the United States. Deaths due to excessive drinking account for 1 in 10 total deaths among working-age adults aged 20 to 64 years.
**EXCESSIVE DRINKING IS A CONTRIBUTOR TO CHRONIC CONDITIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ELEVATES THE RISK OF:</th>
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<tr>
<td>→ Cardiovascular disease &amp; high cholesterol</td>
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<tr>
<td>→ Diabetes</td>
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<td>→ Depression</td>
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<td>→ Breast cancer, head and neck cancer, esophageal cancer and other cancers</td>
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<td>→ Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias</td>
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<td>→ Accidents, injury, &amp; trauma</td>
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<td>→ Mortality</td>
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“Excessive alcohol consumption is the 3rd leading preventable cause of death in the United States.”

— NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON ALCOHOL ABUSE AND ALCOHOLISM

Source: Internal Tempest data, 2019
COVID-19 HAS EXACERBATED EXCESSIVE ALCOHOL USE

People have been using alcohol as a way to cope with uncertainty, grief, isolation, disrupted routines, financial insecurity, homeschooling and all of the other stressors associated with COVID-19.

While alcohol may provide momentary relief from stress, negative feelings flood back after the initial effects of alcohol start wearing off.

People have continued to drink despite these consequences as COVID has made it more difficult to find alternative sources of relief.

MARCH 21, 2020

“54% Increase in national sales of alcohol compared with 1 year before”

NIELSEN

SEPT 29, 2020

“Women show a 41% increase in heavy drinking over past year”

JAMA NETWORK
COVID-19 HAS EXACERBATED EXCESSIVE ALCOHOL USE
# HOW TO TELL IF ALCOHOL MAY BE A PROBLEM?

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<tr>
<th>ALCOHOL USE DISORDER</th>
<th>PROBLEM DRINKING</th>
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<td>→ Drinking more or longer than intended</td>
<td>→ Is alcohol interfering with the way I want to live?</td>
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<td>→ Tried stopping but couldn’t</td>
<td>→ How do I feel after drinking - mentally and Physically?</td>
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<td>→ Strong cravings</td>
<td>→ Does my drinking self align with my values?</td>
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<td>→ Fail to meet obligations</td>
<td>→ 9 in 10 adults who binge drink do not have a severe alcohol use disorder.</td>
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<td>→ Cut back on other activities to drink</td>
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<td>→ Continued to drink despite consequences</td>
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<tr>
<td>→ Drinking more to get the same effect</td>
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<tr>
<td>→ Withdrawal symptoms</td>
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AGENDA

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→ Root causes of excessive use

→ A holistic approach to recovery
The Cycle of Addiction & Excessive Drinking

- We each start with a unique set of vulnerabilities.
- We reach outside ourselves to ease the pain and find a unique fit that helps us self-regulate by providing pain relief and escape in the short term.
- Eventually, addictive patterning in the brain and body chemistry emerges.
- The substance amplifies the original vulnerabilities and creates its own set of problems.
- The substance or process becomes more important as our vulnerabilities grow and worsen.
WHAT ARE VULNERABILITIES?

Vulnerabilities
Genetics (resilience, neurochemical imbalances, nutritional/hormonal imbalances, high or low responder to alcohol), trauma, deficits in self-regulation or interpersonal relationships, psychiatric disorders, stress, poverty, despair, access, culture, disenfranchisement, peer group, age of exposure, role models, connection, purpose, meaning, community, etc.
GUILT VS. SHAME

- **Shame** is an internalized response in which blame is placed on the self
- Guilt is not internalized and the blame is placed on the situation
- Shame has been associated with less self-regulation, while guilt has been associated with better self-regulation skills
- Those higher on shame-proneness used more alcohol and experienced more alcohol-related problems
- Part of treatment must be removing feelings of shame
Understanding how the brain works is key to understanding habit, motivation, will and willpower.

Every part of the brain is affected by addiction but primarily affected are the midbrain and the prefrontal cortex.
• This is where addiction lives

• Responsible for our drive to survive (sex, eating, fighting)

• Home to the brain’s dopamine producing “reward center”

• Normally kept in check by more evolved parts of our brain
THE PREFRONTAL CORTEX

- Most evolved part of the brain
- Responsible for (among other things):
  - Evaluating the world
  - Conceiving of choice
  - Deciding positive from negative
  - Exerting will
  - Making judgements and choices
Ordinarily, the prefrontal cortex exerts top-down control over the unconscious impulses of the midbrain.

In addiction:
- The PFC is weakened and submits to the overpowering drive of the midbrain.
- The need for the addictive substance becomes part of the survival instinct in the midbrain.

**This is why rebuilding the PFC is imperative in addiction treatment.**
The brain is able to rewire its circuitry after a period of abstinence.

National Institute on Drug Abuse presentation on *Drugs, Brains, and Behavior, The Science of Addiction*
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Because addiction stems from all of these areas, recovery must address all of these areas:

**Emotional**
- Inner health
- Emotions, spirituality, cognitive endeavors

**Physical**
- Bodily/physical health
- Nutrition, movement

**Social**
- Relationship health
- Setting boundaries, finding community

**Environmental**
- Home spaces, work spaces
- Finances, systems
DEALING WITH EMOTIONS AND THE MIND

Emotional
- Emotion regulation
- Trauma
- Anxiety
- Shame
- Negative thinking
- Lack of purpose

COVID Impact
- Increased grief and loss
- Loss of jobs, financial pressures
- Fear of illness
- 3x more anxiety and 4x more depression than in 2019
DEALING WITH EMOTIONS AND THE MIND

So, you drank again. Now what?
1. Write down all of the reasons that you wanted to quit drinking in the first place.
2. If you drank when you didn’t want to, make a list of what you’ve learned.
3. Thank yourself (out loud!) for showing up, for trying something new!

FALSE:
If people knew how sad I am, they will think I’m weak.

TRUE:
I am sad in this moment, and it’s okay.
OUR BODY & PHYSICAL HEALTH

Our body & physical health
- Brain chemistry
- Nourishment
- Effects of stress
- Chronic pain

COVID Impact
- Higher stress
- Staying in the house creates less movement; gyms closed
- 55% of people exercising less during COVID
- Harder to shop for food
OUR BODY & PHYSICAL HEALTH

**Foods To Support Your Recovery**

- Soup & Stews
- Carbs
- Smoothies
- Calcium-Rich Foods
- Fermented Foods
- Nuts

**Holistic Nutritionist, James Lyons**

In early sobriety, our nutritional needs are higher than usual, especially for replenishing the vitamins and minerals our bodies need to naturally fuel our feel-good energy and mood boosters—serotonin, GABA, and dopamine.

We called upon Holistic Nutritionist, James Lyons for his recommended foods to add to our daily routine.

1. Soups, Stews, and Smoothies Blended foods are easier for our bodies to digest and super hydrating. In early sobriety, stress our bodies.

**How to fall asleep without alcohol.**

**HOW IT STARTED (OLD EVENING RITUAL):**
Drink a few glasses of wine before bed to come down from the day.

**HOW IT’S GOING (NEW EVENING RITUAL):**
Create a relaxing evening routine: take a bubble bath, drink warm tea, stretch, and light candles.
Social/Relationships
- Lack of community
- Family dysfunction
- Intimacy
- Friendships/peer group

COVID Impact
- Very limited in-person connections & recovery meetings
- Hard to meet new people
- Excess time spent with household members
RELATIONSHIPS

ATTENDING HOLIDAY EVENTS SOBER

How to tell your family & friends you’re not drinking.

BOUNDARY TIP #1
You don’t owe anyone an explanation.

BOUNDARY TIP #2
You don’t have to feel guilty for saying, “No.”

BOUNDARY TIP #3:
It’s ok if you need to leave early (or not go).

WINE-FREE WAYS TO PRACTICE SELF-CARE AS A NEW PARENT.
If you have...

5 Minutes
- Make a cup of herbal tea
- Do a 4-5-7 breathing exercise
- Journal

15 Minutes
- Do a quick stretching routine
- Call a friend to check-in
- Apply skincare products

30 Minutes
- Listen to a podcast
- Be creative
- Read a book that makes you feel good
Environment
- Home environment
- Financial issues
- Systems, policies
- Work

COVID Impact
- Working from home can be distracting / easier to drink
- Home schooling stress
- Financial difficulties due to job loss, health, etc.
- Inequities surfaced by COVID, lack of healthcare
● Conscious mental activities (e.g. decisions, memorization, impulse control/willpower) use up metabolic resources.

● Brain capacity and willpower are finite resources and if we don’t replenish these resources throughout the day, then the evenings become an incredibly difficult time to resist drinking.

● “Trying harder” is rarely the solution.
MANAGING OUR ENERGY

The limbic system takes over: Anxiety, panic, anger, agitation, inability to sit still, being ungrounded

The social engagement system is engaged: A feeling of safety and the ability to “think straight,” which leads to learning and growth

Insula, amygdala & other parts of the brain go offline: Feeling numb, dissociating, “giving up”
HEALTHY COPING TOOLS

- Tangible
  - Poems, readings
  - Pictures
  - Oils and scents
  - Teas or hot lemon water
  - Dark chocolate
  - Healthy snacks
  - NA drinks
  - Tarot cards
  - Books or podcasts
  - Journal
  - Written affirmations
  - Fizzy water

- Intangible
  - Playlists/music
  - Meditations/mindful moments
  - Specific breathwork practices
  - Specific yoga practices
  - Challenging negative thoughts
  - Movement
  - Memorized affirmations
  - Remembering your “why”
  - Playing the drink forward
  - Taking it slow
  - Boundaries
Thank you for joining us!

If you are interested in joining Tempest, use this coupon code to get a discount on your membership: **MHA50**
For more information, please contact Director of Clinical Strategy
Ruby Mehta, LCSW at Ruby@jointempest.com