

ASK AHSC

ANSWERS TO HEALTH QUESTIONS

From The University of Arizona Health Sciences Center (AHSC) in Tucson

(EDITORS NOTE: April is National Alcohol Awareness Month)

Q What are the signs that someone may have a problem with alcohol?

A "CAGE" is a simple mnemonic that can help determine if you, or someone you know, drinks too much.

"C" stands for "cutting back." Have you ever been told to cut back on drinking, or thought that you should cut back? Have you ever tried without success to cut back?

"A" stands for "annoyed." Do you get annoyed when asked to cut back or stop drinking?

"G" stands for "guilty." Do you feel guilty about drinking or things that have happened during a drinking episode?

"E" stands for "eye-opener." Do you need a drink to get going in the morning, to get rid of a hangover?

A "yes" answer to any of these questions indicate that you or someone you know may be headed toward trouble.

One of every 10 drinkers eventually becomes addicted to alcohol. Having more than two drinks a day if you're a man — or more than one if you're a woman — puts you at higher risk for alcoholism and alcohol-related problems.

The younger a person starts drinking, the greater the risk of developing a problem with alcohol or other drugs. Binge drinking (episodes of heavy drinking, to the point of passing out, or being unable to remember what happened, or to the point of getting sick) is a growing problem especially on college campuses.

Alcohol abuse is a major public health problem. Alcohol is the nation's third-leading cause of preventable death. Nearly one-fourth of all Americans admitted to general hospitals have alcohol problems or are undiagnosed alcoholics who are being treated for the consequences of their drinking. Nearly half of all Americans have been exposed to alcoholism in their families.

If you suspect that you or someone you know has a drinking problem, discuss it with your family physician who can refer you to a variety of sources of help and support in the community.

—Lawrence M. Moher, M.D.,
professor, Department of Family and Community Medicine, The University of Arizona College of Medicine, Tucson

Q What's the latest in mammogram technology?

A Digital mammography is the newest technology in breast cancer detection. It produces

breast images through computerization rather than on X-ray film.

Traditional mammography displays breast images on film, which must be processed and developed to view.

Digital mammography images are available on a computer screen within 10 seconds. This should shorten most women's mammography exam to 10 to 15 minutes, about half the time of a traditional mammography exam.

For women with dense breasts, digital mammography uses significantly less radiation. Also, there is much better visibility of the skin.

For radiologists, it's a much more efficient way to store images. We don't have to go through a film archive to compare current and previous mammograms—it's all on the computer. (The American Cancer Society recommends yearly mammograms for women over age 40.)

If a second opinion is needed, the image can be sent electronically to the second doctor's computer -- a distinct advantage in this era of telemedicine.

Images can be instantly magnified and manipulated to make them as clear as possible. This should eliminate call-backs for women whose mammograms weren't clear enough the first time.

—Per Granstrom, M.D.,
medical director, The University Physicians' Tucson Breast Center; associate professor of diagnostic radiology, UA College of Medicine, Tucson

EDITORS NOTE: Digital mammograms are available at The University Physicians' Tucson Breast Center, 2028 E. Prince Road, Tucson, (520)326-6267.