

# VENOM-FREE

Giving up drinking is a challenging decision. But understanding alcohol's impact on the brain, body and behavior can help you reach that goal. Research and the personal experience of alcoholics cite nutrition therapy as a powerful weapon to have on your side in this endeavor.

Alcohol's toxicity interferes with digestion. It blocks vitamin absorption and causes dehydration. "In addition to its direct, poisonous effects on organs such as the liver, heart, brain and stomach, alcohol works indirectly as a sort of nutritional vacuum cleaner, sucking up vitamins and minerals and leaving the body with numerous deficiencies."<sup>9</sup> Strength and energy are sapped. "Alcohol attacks every organ in the digestive system. It hits them all hard, creating nutritional disaster for the alcoholic."<sup>10</sup>

Simply removing alcohol from the body cannot reverse the damage already done. Abstinence alone does not convert malnourished cells into healthy ones. But when saturated with nutrients, these cells can begin the work of healing themselves.

Nutrition therapy also helps minimize cravings. "An overwhelming majority of habitual alcohol and drug abusers were suffering from severe metabolic and nutritional imbalances. When these conditions were corrected, these patients usually experienced sharply diminished needs for getting high by artificial means."<sup>11</sup> The American Dietetic Association recommends nutrition therapy for fewer cravings in the first days of quitting and lessened mental and physical discomfort.

The brain's biochemical makeup must regain balance following alcohol use. Taking in super nutrition from an onslaught of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and legumes (plus nutritional supplements) is a powerful aid you can use in the healing process.

But knowing how to properly feed yourself also includes abstaining from foods that will jeopardize your plan for recovery. Three foods are known to defeat this objective. Let's talk briefly about sugar.

Sugar and alcohol have a lot in common. They both are simple carbohydrates with no nutritional value and are absorbed by the body very quickly. Their caloric loads are all empty calories. They feed each other's cravings. There is strong belief in the "enormous connection between sugar intake and your cravings for alcohol."<sup>12</sup>

White flour products are No. 2 on the list. When whole wheat becomes white flour, 83% of the nutrients are discarded. White flour breaks down and is absorbed quickly. In its concentrated and nutritionally empty state, white flour also sets up high and low swings in the body that leave you chemically imbalanced, nutritionally deficient and craving alcohol.

The third culprit is coffee. Although perceived as the savior of many a drinker the morning after, caffeine is a powerful central-nervous-system drug. Under its influence, adrenal glands are forced to release chemicals that push the heart to pump harder and the liver to release stored sugars. This sets in motion a similar pendulum swing as caused by sugar and white flour, translating into loss of energy, possible depression and cravings.

Being venom-free requires a decision, a plan, support and accountability, redefined goals for your life, and utilization of all the assistance that can be had. It requires rejecting the lies that alcohol benefits you, and fueling your body with the highest nutritional octane available. To be truly healthy in mind, body and spirit, you must take responsibility for nurturing your body, your brain, and in turn, your life.

# IN THE END

Alcohol may be the world's oldest known drug. But its contribution to society is a grim one. This silent menace has deceived countless unsuspecting prey. If you find yourself ensnared in its grip, you need to know that there is a Source of power that is longing to free you. The Creator God can restore and heal the basic core of any addiction.

The Bible says "Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaints? Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes? Those who linger over wine, who go to sample bowls of mixed wine. Do not gaze at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup [when it is fermented], when it goes down smoothly! In the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper."<sup>13</sup> The poisonous venom of snakebite contains some of the most complex toxins known. Venoms zero in on the central nervous system, brain, heart, kidneys, and blood. But the words to be considered here are "In the end." In the end—when it is finished with you.

The Bible also says that "sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."<sup>14</sup> This is not just referring to physical death. The death that sin works kills our spirit, our capacity to experience joy, peace and pleasure, our manhood and womanhood, our very soul.

God provided the most powerful antidote ever needed for sin's deadly bite when He sent His Son to set us free. He longs to give you the power to live in His abundance. With our weakness united to His strength, our ignorance to His wisdom, our frailty to His enduring might, as a branch connected to the vine, we can have that abundant life.

- 1 "Only Moderate Drinking Wards Off Stroke," January 3, 2005, *HealthDayNews*, <http://www.ajc.com/health/content/shared-auto/healthnews/alca/523171.html>.
- 2 *Sober and Staying That Way*, Susan Powter, p. 127.
- 3 [http://preventdisease.com/news/articles/Heavy\\_Social\\_Drinkers\\_Show\\_Brain\\_Damage\\_Study\\_Finds.shtml](http://preventdisease.com/news/articles/Heavy_Social_Drinkers_Show_Brain_Damage_Study_Finds.shtml).
- 4 *Proof Positive*, Dr. Neil Nedley, p. 438.
- 5 *The Owner's Manual for the Brain*, Pierce J. Howard, PhD, p. 107.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 108.
- 7 *Sober and Staying That Way*, Susan Powter, p. 135.
- 8 *Prevention's Giant Book of Health Facts*, 1991.
- 9 *Sober and Staying That Way*, Susan Powter, p. 141.
- 10 Quoted in *Eating Right to Live Sober*, Katherine Ketchum and Ann Mueller.
- 11 *Sober and Staying That Way*, Susan Powter, p. 155.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 200.
- 13 Proverbs 23:29-33, NIV.
- 14 James 1:15.

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# ALCOHOL

## The Viper's Bite

*Living It Up!*

# ALCOHOL The Viper's Bite

O God, that men should put an enemy in  
their mouths to steal away their brains!  
—William Shakespeare, *Othello*

**G**rapes and grains. What could be better for you? Thanks to the media's "feel good" publicity and the wholesome image conferred by mainstream medicine, alcohol is hailed as the social lubricant for finding that perfect someone, the stimulant that infuses you with courage and power, the reward you deserve after a hard day's work, the daily tonic that will keep heart disease at bay.

The medical world's endorsement of alcohol stems from the French who reputedly drink large amounts of wine and report less heart disease than Americans. However, controversy and questions have arisen over whether this supposed reduced risk comes from flavonoids and other antioxidants in the grapes, or whether alcohol affects blood clotting. In any case, the American Heart Association warns that alcohol does increase dangers such as high blood pressure and breast cancer, and therefore does not encourage people to start drinking.

Dr. Kenneth Mukamal, Associate Professor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School, examining the assumption that moderate drinking also prevents stroke, collected data on 38,156 men. He concluded that "in the last few years, it has become increasingly clear that that [assumption] might not be the case."<sup>1</sup> Men who drink three or more glasses of alcohol a day increase their risk of stroke by almost 45%, compared with nondrinkers.

While the media and much of the medical world openly endorse alcohol use, there are other facts worth considering.

## PAIN FOR PROFIT

**F**rom beer to hard liquor, more than \$86 billion is spent annually in America alone! That's a lot of money, jobs, and political clout. Have you ever speculated on the revenues that corporations and federal agencies earn from supporting the sale of alcohol? We've been sucked into an attractively disguised trap. Over 600-million annual advertising dollars lie behind its powerful lure. Unfortunately, alcohol doesn't just rob our pocketbooks; it robs us of something far more valuable.

- Alcohol is poison. No cell in the body is resistant to it: "Every time you drink, you are poisoning yourself. Six major organs—your brain, heart, liver, pancreas, lungs, and kidneys—are being poisoned. And the one that's affected most by alcohol [is] your brain—the behavioral center of it all!"<sup>2</sup>

- Alcohol is a depressant that initially stimulates. Once it dissolves into the blood stream, it crosses the blood-brain barrier. This barrier is intended to block harmful substances, yet alcohol easily passes through. In the outer brain, it first distorts judgment and lowers inhibition. It then continues on to slow brain

activity and rob brain cells of water and glucose (the brain's food), all while producing a sense of pleasure.

- Alcohol weakens the physical brain structures and brain chemicals necessary for healthy brain function. When these were measured on volunteers, using magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and standard tests, researchers found, "Our heavy drinkers' sample was significantly impaired on measures of working memory, processing speed, attention, executive function, and balance."<sup>3</sup>

- Alcohol affects young brains the most. Since portions of the brain don't fully mature until ages 23 (women) and 30 (men), that segment of society that drinks most freely is most in danger. "Studies of young rats show that the developing brain sustains 'far more damage to memory and learning systems than an adult brain receiving the equivalent amount of alcohol.' Alcohol blocks electrical signals that travel within the brain during the learning process."<sup>4</sup> Scott Swartzwelder, a psychiatrist at Duke University Medical Center, found that the equivalent of up to two drinks a day depresses receptors in the brains of young people, interfering with learning and memory.<sup>5</sup>

## MISCONCEPTIONS

**W**hen we think of someone with an alcohol "problem," we picture an unshaven wino in a gutter, whose address is a cardboard box. But this misconception is incomplete because alcohol dependency knows no discrimination. It is found in every social/financial status, career field, religion, and in alarmingly younger age groups. It impacts every level of society.

Dependency often hides behind a mask of normalcy. One U.S. study reported that a prominent predictor of eventual alcoholism in 20-year-olds (listed behind the #1 predictor of having an alcoholic father) was a low physiological and psychological sensitivity to alcohol.<sup>6</sup> In other words, those most able to function "normally" while under alcohol's influence are the very ones most prone to becoming physiologically dependent.

People metabolize alcohol differently. In some drinkers, the poison that alcohol converts into is broken down too quickly and neutralized slowly. This forces the body to adapt to its presence in ways that will eventually bring about dependence.<sup>7</sup> In others, alcohol is absorbed at a "normal" rate, but dependency still develops as it successfully delivers whatever empowering, numbing, void-filling, tension-releasing effects its use is intended for.

## SILENT SERPENT

**I**n the beginning, alcohol is a kick. It's fun and distracting—a quick and pleasant buzz. And the pleasure is very real. Any addictive substance (from cocaine, street drugs, prescription drugs and alcohol, to caffeine and nicotine) stimulates the firing rate of neurons within the pleasure centers of the brain. This is the reason for its appeal—the resulting euphoria.

This doesn't sound so bad until we understand neuro-adaption, which

happens when brain cells are forced to adjust to the foreign substance. Tolerance occurs as the brain chemically and structurally adapts to increasingly higher levels of the substance.

*Serotonin*, one of these chemicals, is the brain's happy hormone—the peace-keeper for all emotions and drives. It is associated with clear thinking, impulse control, and social success. While alcohol initially increases serotonin, creating a sense of calm and euphoria, it then causes levels to plummet. Serotonin's ability to keep our mob of basic instincts in line gives way to impulsive, irritable, nervous, anxious, depressed, aggressive or violent behavior.

*Dopamine* is another important chemical. This one is directly related to the reward circuits of the brain. It sharply increases pleasure when released in greater concentrations. When over-stimulated, the brain strives to keep itself in balance by blunting the effect of this influx of chemical surges. A single brain chemical off its normal level by only 5-10% can unbalance other neurotransmitters, setting in motion a chain reaction of chemical errors. These, in turn, produce a wide variety of mental problems or imbalances that cut loose our basic drives. Behavioral responses then become little more than impulses. The ability and freedom to choose a response based on more than impulse is essential to living harmoniously with others and ourselves.

Alcohol is the most prolific activator and deactivator of brain centers. It directly affects our genes. Gene defects can unbalance brain chemical production, reducing our very capacity to experience pleasure. At first alcohol delivers, but in the end it robs you of the very thing you were trying to gain—just as in Frank's case.

As a 6'1" teenager, Frank hardly looked like a guy who needed to drink to be cool and get the girls. But that's how his alcohol use began. He never dreamed that drinking to relax his self-consciousness in order to have sex would lead to his eventual depression and impotence. Now at 83 pounds and dying of cirrhosis of the liver, he admits to not being able to have sex for 35 years. Alcohol lowers the male hormone *testosterone* and inhibits sexual function by constricting blood vessels. While alcohol initially increases sexual desire, it decreases performance.

## ILLUSIVE IMMUNITY

**M**ost drinkers believe they are impervious to alcohol's control. Some say, "I only drink beer," or "I don't drink that much," or "It's not a problem—I'm not the addictive type."

A bottle or can of beer, glass of wine, mixed drink or straight liquor all contain virtually identical amounts of pure alcohol. Americans drink about 500 million gallons of pure alcohol each year.<sup>8</sup> As for addictive personalities, studies show no evidence that personality disorders predispose a person to alcoholism. Rather, personalities change as a result of drinking.

Face your alcohol consumption realistically. Ask yourself, "Why do I drink? What is it really doing for and to me?" Its injurious effects far outweigh any possible benefits it may offer.