

## **WOMEN AND ALCOHOLISM**

Women are not immune from the disease of alcoholism and the disease itself is the same for men and women. However, when you look at the progression of the disease, women generally develop dependence more quickly than men. There are also significant differences between men and women in the denial process and the treatment regimen.

Alcoholism is a progressive disease that will get worse over time if it is not treated. Most men develop the disease over a period of many years. Women generally develop alcoholism within five years. Women absorb and metabolize alcohol differently than men. Generally, women have less body water than men of similar body weight. Alcohol mixes with body water and the alcohol becomes more highly concentrated in a woman's body than in a man's. Therefore, women will have higher concentrations of alcohol in the blood after drinking equivalent amounts of alcohol. The higher blood alcohol levels cause women to sustain more somatic and cognitive damage than men when consuming the same amount of alcohol. Alcohol abuse also places women at higher risk than men for serious medical problems such as breast cancer and liver, brain and heart damage. They may also develop these problems more rapidly than men.

Women with alcoholism present with a unique set of treatment factors that need to be addressed if women are to achieve and maintain sobriety. Women generally must deal with a greater social stigma than men. Attention must be given to their biological differences in metabolizing alcohol. They may have histories of physical and sexual abuse to address.

The treatment plan must be comprehensive and focused on the individual needs of each woman. Women may face issues of underemployment and being underinsured or without insurance. A woman may be the primary caregiver for her children. She will need a safe place for the care of her children or she will drop out of treatment if problems occur for the children. Women generally have greater issues with guilt and shame for their alcoholism. Women may deny that drinking is a problem and rationalize it as an acceptable coping mechanism to deal with physical or mental health issues. These issues can prevent women from succeeding with the treatment they need if they are not appropriately addressed in their treatment program. For alcoholism treatment for women to be effective, colleagues, family and treatment providers need to be aware of these unique differences between women and men.

Sources:

gettingthemsobber.com, alcoholism.about.com and The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) Columbia University

If you are a licensed health service professional and would like to take advantage of the NE LAP services, please contact the NE LAP at (800) 851-2336 or (402) 354-8055 or visit our website at [www.lapne.org](http://www.lapne.org).

### **Nebraska Licensee Assistance Program**

Alcohol/Drug abuse assistance for health service professionals licensed, certified or registered by the State of Nebraska