



Is drinking really bad? *It Depends on the “Liver.”*

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in the liver.

One or two drinks is not bad for you. People often say this. They also say that this puts you at ease and relaxes you. And there is some truth to that. People also advocate that drinking wine is good for the heart based on a report many years ago. These benefits are not well understood, are questionable and often overestimated. Because some people believe that it is good for the heart the thinking goes that more is better. Not true. More may actually be harmful. When was the last time your doctor told you to start drinking red wine to help your heart? The idea of eating more grapes for the same benefits instead of drinking wine is not appealing to the drinkers.

While it is true that some people find a drink, or two relaxing they know to stop after the first 1 or 2 drinks. For others, it is impossible to stop after the first 1 or 2 drinks. They quickly lose count. These are the individuals that should be concerned. They may be at risk of being or becoming alcoholics. They may not realize or may deny the problem. Even the families are in disbelief. Some families may say that the person may be a problem drinker but is not an alcoholic.

Realization may come after a bad consequence e.g. a car accident or legal problem from drinking and driving or a physical problem caused by excessive drinking or problems in relationships in the family or at work. It would be helpful if the realization comes before a tragedy strikes and before damage occurs. It can save lives and prevent misery.

Alcoholism is often referred to as a medical disease – a chronic and relapsing disease. This is for good reasons. Research has shown that even a single drink produces changes in the liver cells. These changes reverse after the effect of alcohol wear off. Now, imagine that the person keeps drinking. The liver cells do not have a chance to recover. When there is an injury to the skin, a scar develops after the wound heals. The scar tissue is not the same as surrounding skin. It looks different and does not function like skin. For example, it cannot allow hair to grow and it does not have sweat glands. In a similar manner, when liver cells are injured repeatedly, liver cells become scar tissue. Needless to say, that the scar tissue cannot perform the functions of the liver cells. There comes a point, when the damage can become progressive. For those who are more curious, these liver cells are called hepatic cells. There are millions of them

There is an old pun “Life depends on the ‘liver’.” Let us talk about the role of liver in the life of the “Liver.” Liver is a vital organ essential for life. It is an amazing organ. It is the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus (Victoria Terminus) or the Mumbai (Bombay) Central of our body. Heavy traffic flows through it. It weighs about 3 pounds and is located in the upper right side of our belly (abdomen). Liver helps to process and remove many toxins from the blood. It helps with glycogen storage. It helps to decompose red blood cells that have reached the end of their lives. It produces hormones. It helps with the digestion. It produces bile

which helps us to digest fat. The greenish fluid that you see when you are sick and throw up is bile. Liver has some 500 functions which help with metabolism of carbohydrate, sugar, protein, and fat. It helps with breakdown of insulin and hormones. That should tell you the importance of this. These functions are accomplished through its connections with other organs and systems in the body. Remember, it is the Mumbai Central of our body.

Excessive and chronic drinking can result in damage to the liver cells and cause liver diseases. These include alcoholic hepatitis, fatty liver,

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South Asian Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) Meetings

South Asian AA meetings are free and held every week. No appointment is necessary – any individual with an alcohol problem and a desire to quit is welcome.

The atmosphere is non-judgmental and supportive.

Schedule: Every Thursday 8:00 PM – 9:00 PM

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

1295 Oak Tree Road (enter on Middlesex Ave), Iselin, NJ 08830

You can get more information on

www.samhin.org/alcoholics-anonymous

or by calling 732-902-2561

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and cirrhosis. Any of these diseases result in failure of the liver to perform many of its 500 functions mentioned earlier. Many prescribed medications are processed in the liver. If the liver does not function well, these medications can cause toxic effects. It can result in diabetes or worsen existing diabetes.

Fatty liver is when excess fat builds up in the liver. It can impair the functioning of the liver. If the person stops drinking this can still be reversible. Fatty liver is often accompanied by alcoholic hepatitis, which is

inflammation of the liver cells. Liver becomes enlarged and the person feels unwell. Fluid is backed in the abdomen and liver enzymes are elevated. Unchecked, it can progress to fibrosis (scarring) and cirrhosis. The long-term damage to liver results in cirrhosis. Here, the liver tissue is replaced with the scar tissue. It results in many visible signs like changes in skin, jaundice and many other signs that the physician looks for when this is suspected. It can also affect the brain and the person can go into a coma when it is severe and advanced

(hepatic encephalopathy). The liver increasingly loses its capacity to perform many functions and in time affects the whole body.

One simple test to detect liver disease early is a blood test to measure liver enzymes. These levels rise when the liver is damaged from any cause (alcohol is only one cause).

As I said, life depends on the liver. Excessive and chronic alcohol use is bad for the liver. So, if you ask if alcohol is bad for you, it does depend on the liver!

Alcohol not only affects the liver, but also many other organs in the body. Stay tuned for this in the

next issue of Tiranga. In the future issue we will also discuss how much alcohol is too much.

SAMHIN, South Asian Mental Health Initiative & Network, is a non-profit organization that strives to address the mental health needs of the South Asians.

If you know someone that has a drinking problem and has a desire to quit visit www.samhin.org/alcoholics-anonymous/ or call 732-902-2561 to learn about free program or if you have any questions. You can also write to us at info@samhin.org.

