

Hormones & Health Webinar

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How Alcohol Causes Nutrient Deficiencies

by Dr. Michele Neil-Sherwood | Nutrition



Many patients forget to tell me about their alcohol consumption. A glass of wine here and there is not a big deal. Once it becomes a routine or greater than 3 to 4 times a week vitamin deficiencies and clinical symptoms may show up. To get a better understanding of why this occurs let's first take a look at how the body processes alcohol.

Metabolizing alcohol requires nutrients.

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As the liver decreases its supply of vitamins and nutrients, the blood stream is called upon to replenish the supply. As a result, body cells are deprived of critical nutrients and normal body functions suffer. Some people do not even produce the enzyme to break alcohol down. It remains a toxic substance in the system.

Nutrient deficiencies can cause a variety of negative symptoms.

Many people would like to stop drinking alcohol altogether. Yet, many people experience one or more of the following symptoms after discontinuing alcohol use: anxiety, insomnia, tremors, shakiness, dizziness, depression, impaired cognitive thinking, and poor memory. Many of the symptoms are caused by nutrient deficiencies.

The B-complex vitamins are especially vulnerable and destroyed by alcohol. These vitamins are essential to mental and emotional well being. Deficiencies of other nutrients can also contribute to the negative feelings that frequently lead susceptible individuals toward another alcoholic beverage.

Vitamins and nutrients more commonly affected by alcohol are:

- **Vitamin B1 (thiamin)** – deficiencies trigger depression and irritability and can cause neurological and cardiac disorders among alcoholics.
- **Vitamin B2 (riboflavin)** – Significance in low or deficient in B2.
- **Vitamin B3 (niacin)** – depletion causes anxiety, depression, apprehension and fatigue.
- **Pantothenic acid**– symptoms of deficiency are fatigue, chronic stress and depression.
- **Vitamin B6 (pyridoxine)** – deficiencies can disrupt the formation of neurotransmitters.

- **Vitamin B12**- deficiency will cause depression.
- **Folic Acid** – deficiency is a common cause of depression.
- **Vitamin C** – continuing deficiency causes chronic depression and fatigue.
- **Magnesium** – symptoms of deficiency include confusion, apathy, loss of appetite, weakness and insomnia.
- **Calcium** – depletion effects the central nervous system.
- **Zinc** – inadequacies result in apathy, lack of appetite and lethargy.
- **Iron** – depression is often a symptom of chronic iron deficiency.
- **Manganese** – this metal is needed for proper use of the B-Complex vitamins and Vitamin C.
- **Potassium** – depletion is frequently associated with depression, tearfulness, weakness and fatigue.
- **Chromium** – enhances glucose uptake into cells. A deficiency can cause hypoglycemia.
- **Omega 3 EFA** – in adults, skin disorders and anemia develop as a consequence of EFA deficiency.

Nutrition can combat the effects of alcohol.

To minimize these symptoms and to replenish depleted nutrient stores follow the healthy nutritional protocol and eat a wide variety of nutrient dense foods and avoid foods containing refined sugars and white flours (i.e.- candy bars, cookies, cakes, pies, loaded baked potatoes).

Try to eat at least three meals per day, even if your appetite is poor. Eat healthy food choices when you're hungry.

Good food choices are fruits and vegetables, nuts and seeds, fish, legumes, eggs and chicken. Make sure to include 250mg Vitamin C, 150mg

magnesium, 1500mg calcium and 500 mg niacin from dietary sources each day. A good multivitamin/mineral supplement is also recommended.

Nutrition plays an important role in both emotional and physical health. Alcohol consumption heightens the nutrient need to keep emotions balanced. With a balanced dietary intake that is modeled after a food plan that includes plenty of raw fruits and vegetables, nuts, seeds and good clean protein good health ensues!

See also: [How to Minimize the Toxic Effects of Alcohol](#)

Include omega 3 fatty acids in your diet.

Omega 3 fatty acids can help with decreasing inflammation and improving brain health. Flaxseed and oily fish are both excellent sources of omega 3 fatty acids. Try including 3-4 ounces of fish 2-4 times per week or adding flaxseed to your foods.

Two servings of oily fish per week is the AHA recommendations. Among the fish with the highest omega 3 fatty acid content are Atlantic and Pacific herring, sardines, Atlantic halibut and salmon, lake trout, coho, pink and king salmon, bluefish, albacore tuna and Atlantic mackerel.

Caffeine can worsen symptoms.

Avoid all foods and beverages that contain caffeine- caffeine pulls out nutrients and will worsen anxiety as well as other symptoms.

A healthy body and mind is attainable! If you need help with nutritional guidance, genetic information about the alcohol metabolism specific for your system, or just need a simple jump start, we will be glad to help!

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