Unique Aspects of Women’s Drinking

Women process alcohol differently than men.

- For instance, women have less body water than men of similar weight, so the concentration of alcohol is higher in a woman’s body than in a man’s after drinking the same amounts of alcohol.
- Women also have less of the enzyme that breaks down alcohol in the stomach, resulting in a higher concentration of alcohol being transmitted directly into the system.

Also, women seem to be more at risk than men to suffer from several negative consequences of alcohol.

- Women experience a “telescoping effect” of alcohol—that is, women have a later onset of age of problem drinking than men, but develop a host of problems more quickly than do men. So, if a woman starts drinking heavily at age 35, versus 25 in a man, they may have similar amounts of alcohol-related damage to their internal organs by the time they reach the age of 40.
- Women are more vulnerable to liver, heart, and brain damage than are men. In terms of brain damage, alcohol has particularly adverse effects on women’s attention skills and memory.
- Heavy alcohol consumption increases the risk for breast cancer.
- Women are also at an increased risk for violent victimization and alcohol-related traffic fatalities when drinking.
- Women in general, and particularly problem-drinking women, are more at risk to develop problems like depression and anxiety than are men.
- Women are also typically more concerned than men with issues related to relationships, self-esteem, and caretaking.
- Women differ from men in terms of triggers to drink, as well as in terms of where they drink, their emotions, and their relationships with others.
- Following treatment, women who relapse tend to relapse for different reasons than men.