

## Alcohol Health Questionnaire

### Taken from the Blue Light Project: The Project Manual

*12 Questions for the Generic Worker to ask about alcohol related physical ill health*

*The 12 questions were developed by Mike Ward & Mark Holmes with clinical input from Dr Stephen Ryder Consultant Hepatologist at Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust.*

Below is a list of 12 questions that will be useful to ask when speaking to a service user about their physical health. We are not expecting you to be a medic but here are some simple questions to ask. Please refer to the explanatory notes and encourage them to see their GP with any health issues. Some people have suggested that this is a task for doctors or nurses. However, if we only wait until they see a clinician we will be missing real opportunities to prevent health problems.

It is suggested that an open ended question is used at the beginning of the conversation such as: *Alcohol increases the risk of over 60 different diseases. Have you had any recent health problems? Then get permission to ask the further 12 questions: Can I run through some other health related questions?*

1. Do you ever experience a painful feeling of heaviness or tightness, usually in the centre of your chest, which may spread to your arms, neck, jaw, back or stomach?
2. Have you coughed up blood or noticed blood in your vomit?
3. Have you ever noticed or has someone else commented that the whites of your eyes or your skin have turned yellow?
4. Have you passed any blood from your back passage?
5. Do you have a sensation of numbness or pins and needles in your feet or hands?
6. Have you ever experienced fits (seizures)?  
Have you a history of head injuries (Including non alcohol related and as a child)?
7. Have you lost or gained weight unexpectedly recently?
8. Have you noticed that you bruise more easily than normal?
9. Do you experience or have you experienced a severe, dull pain around the top of your stomach that develops suddenly?
10. Have you or a relative/carer expressed concerns about your memory?
11. Are you practising safe sex? (Applies to males and females)  
Are you using contraception?  
(Applies to males and females)  
Are you thinking about or considering becoming pregnant?  
(Females only)
12. Have you recently had your blood pressure checked or had a blood test?

If there are health concerns you need to encourage them to see their primary care team and in certain circumstances to seek urgent medical attention:

**1. Do you ever experience a painful feeling of heaviness or tightness, usually in the centre of the chest, which may spread to the arms, neck, jaw, back or stomach?**

This question explores if there have been any symptoms of a heart attack. If they answer yes it would be worth asking when they last experienced this and how long did the pain last for. If the symptoms are active this will lead to an emergency call. Previous symptoms should be discussed with a health care practitioner. Seek urgent medical attention

**2. Have you coughed or noticed blood in your vomit?**

A relatively common gastroenterological reason for alcohol related hospital admissions is called a Mallory-Weiss tear which can occur following prolonged and forceful vomiting, coughing or convulsions. Typically the mucous membrane at the junction of the oesophagus and the stomach develops lacerations which bleed, evident by bright red blood in vomit, or bloody stools. Large amounts of blood maybe due to ulceration or oesophageal varices. The amount and colour of blood (coffee grounds to bright red) will be helpful information for a medical practitioner. Seek urgent medical attention

**3. Have you ever noticed or has someone else commented that the whites of your eyes have turned yellow?**

The aim is to identify potential alcoholic liver disease. Even in advanced liver disease there may be no symptoms, so these questions are markers to pick up potential or actual problems. The speed of noticing the colour change is important as this could be potentially life threatening alcoholic hepatitis. Seek urgent medical attention

**4. Have you passed any blood from your back passage?**

If the answer is yes we suggest asking about the colour of the blood. A bleed in the area from the mouth to the stomach can be digested by the stomach. This tends to be black with a consistency of tar. Bright red blood that appears on toilet paper after wiping maybe a symptom of haemorrhoids (piles). Lower bleeds in the bowel will appear 'blood red' or light red. This will also require medical advice as it can be a symptom of other physical disease. The loss of large volumes of blood can indicate complications of liver disease and prompt action will be required. Seek urgent medical attention

**5. Do you have a sensation of numbness or pins and needles in your feet or hands?**

This question aims to detect Peripheral Neuropathy. This is a problem with the nerves that carry information to and from the brain and spinal cord. This produces pain, loss of sensation, and inability to control muscles. The pain is sometimes a shooting pain in the arms or legs. This is a largely treatable condition affecting the nerve endings which can be managed with a combination of pain relief, vitamins and abstinence from alcohol. However, it could cause clumsiness and accidents e.g. cigarette burns.

**6. Have you a history of head injuries (Including non alcohol related and as a child)?**

A history of head injuries can be a precursor to alcohol related brain injury. There is also research suggesting that head injuries in childhood may affect personality traits leading to impulsive behaviours. If the service user has a previous history of alcohol withdrawal seizures, there is a 10-fold increase in risk of seizure in withdrawal. Alcohol related seizures are not only caused by withdrawal. For example alcohol beverage consumption can change the chemistry of minerals in the blood stream or trauma to the head can lead to seizure.

**7. Have you lost or gained weight unexpectedly recently?**

Another symptom of liver disease is ascites. This is fluid that is retained and may be noticeable around the liver and abdomen and ankles. However often smaller amounts are not noticed. Weight gain may be a sign of this. Weight loss may also be a sign of muscle degeneration or symptom of an underlying medical condition.

**8. Have you noticed that you bruise more easily than normal?**

Another symptom of liver disease is bruising caused by the person not making enough clotting factors in the blood. The bruises may appear without injury or be worse than expected when injury has occurred.

**9. Do you experience or have you experienced a severe, dull pain around the top of your stomach that develops suddenly?**

This question aims to detect acute pancreatitis. "Often people experience pain in a different place than the area affected – this is often called 'referred' pain." Service users sometimes confuse this as stomach ache or back pain.

**10. Have you or a relative/carer expressed concerns about your memory?**

There is growing evidence about the effects of alcohol on the brain, in particular the frontal lobes. This can cause not only memory problems but personality changes and poor energy levels. Consideration should be given to how this may impact on accessing treatment services. These questions are also a good prompt to remind service users and carers of the importance of a balanced diet and in particular the need to take vitamin B. If vitamin supplementation is not prescribed then this should be considered/arranged.

**11. Are you practising safe sex? (Applies to males and females) Are you using contraception? (Applies to males and females) Are you thinking about or considering becoming pregnant? (Females only)**

All age groups and both genders need to have information about safe sex. NICE advice on drinking in pregnancy is that women should abstain from alcohol completely during the first three months of pregnancy because of the risks of miscarriage; and to drink no more than one or two units of alcohol once or twice a week for the rest of the pregnancy.

**12. When was the last time you had your blood pressure checked or had a blood test?**

These questions open up discussion with the service user about recent contact they have had with health professionals and what concerns have been raised. If the service user has not had bloods taken recently (last 3 months) then steps should be taken to approach a health care practitioner to see if further tests are required. There is a clear link between high blood pressure (hypertension) and alcohol.