Q: I often have a drink or two after a stressful day. Is that a problem?

A: This is a common practice for many people, but common does not mean risk-free and you are wise to take a look at this if it has become a regular pattern. There are people who simply enjoy a glass of wine or a cocktail before dinner and can maintain that behavior without increasing consumption or it negatively impacting their life. However, for many people, this pattern can turn into a habit that leads to dependency, health issues, and relationship problems.

The key to determining if this is becoming a problem for you is to honestly take a look at your drinking patterns and be mindful of when and why you are reaching for that drink.

Excessive drinking can lead to a variety of health risks, both immediate (such as alcohol-related crashes or falls and alcohol poisoning) and long-term (including heart and liver disease, cancer, mental health problems, and substance use disorders). Social or moderate use of alcohol can become problematic, especially when people turn to alcohol more frequently and in larger quantities to cope with stress, anxiety, or difficult emotions.

**Low-risk drinking** is defined differently for men and women by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA). For women, low-risk drinking is no more than 3 drinks on any single day and no more than 7 drinks per week. For men, it is defined as no more than 4 drinks on any single day and no more than 14 drinks per week. (It’s worth noting “low-risk” does not mean “no risk.”)

The USDA’s Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends that adults of legal drinking age can choose not to drink, or to drink in moderation by limiting intake to 2 drinks or less in a day for men or 1 drink or less in a day for women, on days when alcohol is consumed.

When consumption exceeds those amounts, it is classified as **binge drinking** or heavy alcohol use. The CDC reports that too much drinking can lead to a variety of health problems, including cancer, mental health problems, and substance use disorders.

**Continued on page 2**
defines binge drinking as 5 or more drinks for a man and 4 or more drinks for a woman on the same occasion. It describes heavy drinking as 8 or more drinks per week for women, or 15 drinks or more per week for men.

A new trend identified by the NIAAA is referred to as high-intensity drinking, or consuming alcohol at twice the binge drinking threshold. “Compared with people who did not binge drink, people who drank alcohol at twice the gender-specific binge drinking thresholds were 70 times more likely to have an alcohol-related emergency department visit, and those who consumed alcohol at 3 times the gender-specific binge thresholds were 93 times more likely to have an alcohol-related visit,” the NIAAA reports.

For some individuals, any amount of alcohol would be defined as excessive, including people younger than 21; women who are pregnant or may be pregnant; people on certain medications or who live with certain medical conditions; those who are driving, planning to drive or participating in other activities that require skill, coordination and alertness; and people in recovery or who cannot control the amount they drink.

**ARE YOU CONCERNED ABOUT YOUR DRINKING?**

The Village Employee Assistance Program encourages you to visit the CheckUp & Choices website. Visit this site for a free, confidential screening and objective feedback related to your alcohol use.

Your EAP covers specific services related to alcohol and drug issues, including assessments, prevention education, and post-treatment counseling. Call 1-800-627-8220 for more information. Be sure to say that you are accessing your Village EAP benefit.