

How to Change Your Drinking: A Harm Reduction Guide to Alcohol

Kenneth Anderson

HAMS Harm Reduction Network (October 2010)

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According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), in 2009, nearly fifty-two percent of Americans aged twelve and older had used alcohol at least once in the thirty days prior to being surveyed. Considering the enormity and the prevalence of the alcohol problem in our country, one strategy to mitigate its danger proposes that a harm reduction approach should supersede the unrealistic expectation of full abstinence.

Harm Reduction attempts to dwindle the immediate harm and the latent risks associated with the alcohol, rather than concentrating on the alcohol use itself. It sets realistic goals geared toward risk-free use, and abstinence (if feasible).

Kenneth Anderson, the founder and CEO of the HAMS Harm Reduction Network, has put together a timely, practical guide for harm-reduction information, designed to support people who drink alcohol. Anderson has worked in the field of harm reduction since 2002; he holds a masters degree in linguistics and is currently pursuing a masters in psychology and substance abuse counseling at the New School for Social Research in New York City.

How to Change Your Drinking contains detailed selection methods to help tailor one's own alcohol harm reduction program. The book consists of thirty-two chapters that flow together smoothly and cohesively, and five edifying appendices that cover a variety of topics such as drug interactions with alcohol, naltrexone (an opioid receptor antagonist) treatment, and a classification of alcoholic beverages in terms of calories and sugar content. The book offers a structured approach, with sets of worksheets and practical exercises, including risk-ranking worksheets, drinking charts, goal choice worksheets to help people modify their drinking behavior. It also covers topics like the effect of alcohol on the body and the brain, and explores the various enzymes that break alcohol down, such as alcohol dehydrogenase and catalase. Each chapter is supported by thorough references and provides useful web links.

Overall, Anderson's guide is successful in synthesizing existing reliable therapies for drug abuse—like Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Rational Emotive Therapy—with harm reduction research, and applying them to alcohol use.

How to Change Your Drinking will appeal to a vast audience and serves as a useful guide for clinicians, educators, families, and anyone who drinks alcohol. This volume undergirds the foundation that connects the harm reduction philosophy to alcohol and alcoholism.

RICHARD SKAFF (June 13, 2011)

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