

Not actual patients.

RECOGNIZING ALCOHOL USE DISORDER (AUD) ACROSS THE SPECTRUM

AUD is underdiagnosed and undertreated.[1]

The clinical presentation of alcohol use can vary substantially across patients, posing challenges for recognition, diagnosis, and treatment. In fact, a recent study found that **~90% of all individuals at elevated risk for AUD were undiagnosed.**[1]

AUD is a spectrum disorder, and ~75%* of cases fall in the mild-to-moderate range.[2] However, severe AUD is associated with more significant functional impairment, meaning that **the impact of mild-to-moderate AUD may go unrecognized until symptoms progress.**[3] As illustrated by the hypothetical patient cases of John, Kathryn, and Sam in the next slide, AUD at risk and mild-to-moderate AUD can present in different ways.

*Based on 12-month prevalence data.

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Case-by-Case Comparison

Feature	John–at risk 	Kathryn–mild AUD 	Sam–moderate AUD 
Chief complaint	Brain fog and weight gain	Sleep issues	Hypertension
Alcohol use patterns	Occasional binge drinking, social use, intake is sometimes associated with social coping, plans for and looks forward to drinking	Regular use with emerging patterns linked to coping and daily routines	Increased frequency of binge or heavy drinking episodes with reduced control over alcohol intake
Relevant information in the case	Sleep disruption, history of MDD, cognitive concerns, and family history of AUD; AUDIT-C: 5 (positive at-risk screen for a man)[4]	Low mood, fatigue, sleep disruption, strain in family relationships, and impaired occupational functioning; AUDIT-C: 4 (positive at-risk screen for a woman)[4]	Sleep disturbance, elevated liver enzymes, hypertension, family history of AUD, declining performance at work, and increasing frequency of negative consequences resulting from drinking; AUDIT-C: 5 (positive at-risk screen for a man)[4]
DSM-5 criteria[5] met	1. May be developing a craving or having a strong desire to drink alcohol	1. Alcohol use is continued despite knowledge of having a persistent or recurrent physical or psychological problem, which is likely to have been caused or exacerbated by alcohol 2. Continued alcohol use despite having persistent or recurrent social or interpersonal problems caused by the effects of alcohol 3. Recurrent alcohol use resulting in failure to fulfill major role obligations at work, school, or home	1. Alcohol use is continued despite knowledge of having a persistent or recurrent physical or psychological problem, which is likely to have been caused or exacerbated by alcohol 2. Continued alcohol use despite having persistent or recurrent social or interpersonal problems caused by the effects of alcohol 3. Recurrent alcohol use resulting in failure to fulfill major role obligations at work, school, or home 4. Alcohol is often taken in larger amounts or over a longer period than was intended
What may be overlooked	Subtle patterns of problematic alcohol use that increase the risk of AUD	Alcohol-related contributors to mood, sleep, and daily functioning	• Persistent and escalating patterns of problematic alcohol use associated with clear clinical and functional consequences • Extent of alcohol-related harm and cumulative impact

Recognizing how alcohol use may present across a spectrum may support informed assessment and guide clinical management.

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Key Takeaways:

- AUD exists on a spectrum, with most cases falling within the mild-to-moderate range, which is defined by fewer diagnostic criteria and generally associated with less functional impairment than severe AUD.[2,3,5]
- Patients may present with common or nonspecific symptoms such as mood changes, hypertension, and sleep disturbances, which may not be immediately attributed to alcohol use, making recognition more complex.[6-8]
- Routine, open conversation about alcohol use with patients may support recognition of AUD and appropriate management.[9]

Consider the whole spectrum of AUD and have open, honest conversations with your patients about their alcohol use.

Expand your knowledge of AUD with more educational resources on the Lilly Medical website.
Can you see the whole picture?

AUDIT-C=Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test–Consumption. DSM-5=Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th ed. MDD=major depressive disorder.

References

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