Welcome to the podcast entitled, Health and Wellness Briefs Tactics for a Better You. I'm Doctor Bernadette Melnyk, Vice President for Health Promotion and Chief Wellness Officer for The Ohio State University. This podcast series is brought to you by my CWO office and wonderful, Buckeye Wellness team. In order to provide you with evidence-based micro-learning modules to optimize your health and well-being.

Our podcast starts by taking a dose of Vitamin G. Given that Vitamin G, or gratitude, is one of the simplest research-based strategies to improve mood, sleep and optimism and reduce stress and blood pressure. Please take a few seconds now to think about who, or what, you are grateful for today. Give a dose of Vitamin G to someone today for even more benefit.

My topic today is busting alcohol related myths. My guest is Jodie Leister, who is our fabulous director of our Employee Assistance program at Ohio State. She is a certified mental health counselor who is passionate about employee well-being. Jodie, I'm so glad you could join me today.

Yes, thank you. And some Vitamin G to you for having me today. Thanks so much.

You are quite welcome! Jodie, a lot of people have the misperception to be a problem, you've got to drink alcohol every day, but that's not true. Those who drink daily, those who drink on weekends, those who drink in binges, which could occur weeks, months or even years apart, could also have a problem.

You may be at risk if you are a man, and have more than four drinks in a day, or more than 14 drinks in a week. If you are a woman and have more than three drinks in a day or 7 drinks in a week, that also could signal heavy drinking and you could be at risk for health problems such as heart disease, stroke, liver disease, sleep problems and some types of
cancer. But Jodie, there are so many other myths. I'm wondering if you could talk about a few of them.

00:04:13 Jodie Leister

Absolutely. And you're absolutely right, even the smallest amount of alcohol, depending on the individual and their predispositions, when it comes to family history or other underlying medical conditions. Even the smallest amount or just daily use can affect them in all sorts of ways.

I think that there's an overall idea that alcohol can help you to relax, it can help you to reduce your stress and your anxiety. And while it does do that, it takes that edge off, if you will, for short periods of time. Overall, it numbs your ability to manage anxiety and your own stress response without that alcohol. That's one of the things that we see also with people that have been using alcohol or other substances from a really early age and early on in life, that they haven't had that natural development and maturation. So they tend to struggle even more with the just lifelong use.

But it does feel good initially to help you take the edge off. Like I said, to reduce stress and anxiety, but overall, it really tends to make it worse.

Another one on that same vein that I hear quite a bit is that it helps you sleep. So, in actuality, alcohol is incredibly disruptive to your REM cycles. If you are an unlucky person like myself, that in the smallest amount of alcohol causes insomnia. So when you experience this immediate effect of relaxation and you drink alcohol, yeah, you might initially feel a little sleepy. But overall the quality of the sleep that you're getting is so much less than it would be if you had just avoided having that glass of wine before you go to sleep, or that that cocktail, or something like that. Because we really want to try and make sure that we're having complete cycles of sleep so that it's restorative and we're getting our energy reserves built back up.

Those are two of the main ones that I that I hear a lot of people talking about along with like as you mentioned that binge drinking isn't really an issue.

00:06:23 Dr. Bernadette Melnyk

Right. Thanks for hitting on those two very common myths. I also hear from people. I'm going to feel less depressed in addition to less anxious if I just get some drinks in. But we've got to remember, alcohol is a depressant, and even if you ever use it temporarily, it feels a bit better in the long run. It really contributes to both depression as well as anxiety.
Jodie, can you talk about some of the big red flags that can indicate you may be moving into a real risk category?

00:07:28 Jodie Leister

Yeah. So, you know, within our culture here at OSU, I've said this before that we are, he's very community based and a lot of times as adults, we socialize around alcohol and or alcohol is present in a lot of our social events and things like that. So, it can be difficult to start noticing the signs when you're moving into that unmanageable place.

Because if use is something that is just functionally a part of your life. So, one of the things that I try to look for, encourage people to look for are if they notice that there's a preoccupation with alcohol or with attaining it or using it. If they can't stop thinking about it, it tends to be one of the pillars of what they're looking forward to, specifically about the social engagement, and then accompanying there may be some shame or regret or just embarrassment over their use afterwards.

Those types of emotional responses, those are those, are very common, but they're telling you something. And when you talk, think about how we can in the long-term lead to more depressive symptoms and anxiety. Those are very important to focus on and then also I would say if you are finding yourself justifying it more and more in that you know almost experiencing a feeling of obligation like you, you need to do it, those are probably the most difficult ones to identify for people.

00:08:57 Dr. Bernadette Melnyk

Absolutely. And if you haven't been able to cut down or stop drinking on your own, even though you've tried, or you want to. And this is you bring up about your urge to drink is so strong you can't think about anything else. All these are signs that you could be moving into an alcohol problem.

So, what exists if somebody is getting concerned about their use of alcohol, what resources are available to you?

00:09:55 Jodie Leister

So here in Central Ohio, there are a lot of different resources, and I can specifically speak to those. But overall, you know, most communities that you people live in, even the most rural communities, have a public health system and within the public health system, ours in Columbus, for example, is very robust and they offer walk-in assessments they also offer medication assisted treatment and things like that for individuals that are
underinsured or uninsured, and they also most here in central Ohio, offer Narcan and things of that nature at no cost as well.

But so here in central Ohio, like I said, we have some options for inpatient and also for outpatient or intensive outpatient through changes in Columbus Springs or the Valley View Health Center in Waverly, Ohio which is a really great residential option.

And, then counseling. Going to in person, counseling or group counseling is a really great option. We have some great providers here and then of course there are support groups that you can find really that are faith-based or unaffiliated. There are also non-abstinence-based support groups and counseling options that individuals can use here in central Ohio. The AA, is Alcoholics Anonymous, is a very robust community resource that's developed over many, many years. And the Central Ohio Group Fellowship is a great option for finding any local Alcohol Anonymous or Al-Anon or Alateen classes or support groups if you need that.

00:11:31 Dr. Bernadette Melnyk

I think those are fabulous resources, Jodie. What I'd like to end with to tell our listeners if you're questioning, if you have a problem, it's important to face that story. It is not a weakness to recognize when we need help. It is truly a strength to recognize it and to get help.

So, I appreciate all of you listening to Health and Wellness Briefs today. Tune in to other podcasts in this series to learn more evidence-based tips for a healthier, happier and better you.