

methyl alcohol is about proportional to their occurrence in partly fermented natural foods — the implications being that, but for their long consumption, all would be as toxic as wood alcohol. There must be a genetic connection somewhere.

My own observation from dealing with the problem among industrial employees has been that the most likely candidates were those on whom alcohol has a less-than-average intoxicating effect. They seem to metabolize it much more quickly, thereby reducing the amount in the bloodstream so there is less effect on the nervous system. Some even say, "Alcohol doesn't affect me." I know of at least six such persons who ultimately died of alcohol-related causes. In one case the man never took a drink until he was about 40 because of his family history, but then he got into a job where it was almost impossible to refuse. Within 10 years he had lost his job and was dead.

Although I believe that there must be a genetic reason why people metabolize their alcohol differently, it is obvious that there are differences in the learned ability to exercise self control, which is a subject that has been largely ignored by the psychological community.

Gary G. Grant  
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I find it hard to accept the idea that, according to psychologist G. Alan Marlatt, "about 15 to 20 percent . . . [of alcoholics] . . . can safely engage in moderate or social

drinking" ("Intoxicating Habits," SN: 8/6/88, p.88). Based on my personal experience as an alcoholic and drug addict, if you can do that, you aren't an alcoholic in the first place.

If you really are addicted — to alcohol, narcotics, cocaine, nicotine, whatever — in the end there is no alternative to quitting. Using whatever method works for you, you have to screw your courage to the sticking point, and simply stop.

It is part of the nature of alcoholism to be extremely inventive in making excuses to avoid stopping drinking. I guarantee that 100 percent of alcoholics are going to believe that they fall into the "15 to 20 percent" who can drink socially. Whether or not the concept is true, it will become one more excuse to be overcome for the remaining 80 to 85 percent (if you believe in the concept) or 100 percent (if you don't). It's hard to see how it adds to the general discussion.

One other point: There are certain things that rational research can deal with, but addiction is basically a nonrational process, and needs other forms of societal constraint as well. We should get practical, take a lesson from Sweden and other countries, and get serious about drunk driving penalties and enforcement.

Bruce D. Bender  
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I'm a recovering alcoholic. At one time I did manage a four-year, four-month period of abstinence on my own. I did not like it, but the desire to drink was gone. I took one drink, as an experiment, and it felt like fireworks going off in my brain. I was worse than ever before. It took five years of trying to gain control before

I finally went to Alcoholics Anonymous. Their program treats the abstinence portion as only a partial solution. I had to learn to change my outlook on life by making an honest effort to follow the 12 suggested steps.

Most alcoholics can play the game of "See, I'm not an alcoholic" by getting a handle on their drinking for a period of time; this allows the eventual reward of a real bender. I didn't relax when I drank. I flew. Alcoholics drink from a different bottle than social drinkers, and only alcoholics can know the feeling.

John C.  
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### Fight, flee or freeze?

The "fight or flight" response always pops up in discussions of stress, such as "The Depression-Stress Link" (SN: 9/3/88, p.155). I wonder why a third, easily observable stress reaction, "iced," is never mentioned?

Many animals neither flee nor fight when threatened; instead, they freeze, either habitually or occasionally. Humans, too, sometimes become paralyzed (immobile, speechless or incapable of making a decision) in a crisis or following surprise. Perhaps shock, fainting, hysterical paralysis and even catalepsy are extreme forms of "icing."

Could depression be seen as a mild protracted variation of a normal, ancient stress response, i.e., "icing," rather than as a failure of archaic stress response mechanisms to fit modern life, as suggested by Gold? And, in any case, why isn't "iced" routinely considered as a stress reaction?

Robert Frye  
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