Drinking to Pass the Time — It’s called Kalsarikannit

Did you know the Finnish have a word for “the feeling when you are going to get drunk home alone in your underwear — with no intention of going out?” That word is Kalsarikannit. Google translate gives Kalsarikannit a simpler definition: “Underwear Drunk.”

Pronounced “kal-sa-ri-kan-nit,” the word has been around awhile, but the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland has just released a pair of emoji to proudly share its magic with the world. The new Kalsarikannit emoji depict a very happy-looking man and woman lounging around in, yes, their underwear, holding their alcoholic beverages of choice (a beer for him, a glass of red wine for her). Now Americans, Finnish, Britiish and more are saying Kalsarikannit “should be used whenever you’ve had a bad week, have an open bottle of gin and all your friends are busy.” So in a world where it is 5 o’clock somewhere, and you’ve had a long day of being cooped up with kids in the house or nobody in the house...how are we working through these new stressors?

Alcohol distributors reported a 50% increase in the sales of alcohol from one week in March of the coronavirus compared to a week the same year ago. Home delivery of alcohol has increased dramatically, and one report notes a 300% increase in alcohol sales in March compared to January. Well, one possibility is in January people were practicing Dry January, a common New Year’s resolution to avoid alcohol for the month of January. And the rebound sales and corona alcohol hoarding made that bump. Of course, it could have been just sales of high proof alcohol to clean the kitchen counters. Maybe people were stocking up for social distancing. Sales of alcoholic beverages in the United States have increased 55% compared to this time last year. Our lives are stressful already and alcohol consumption can be a common way to self-medicate those stresses. So now the added stresses of too many people stuck together in the house or apartment, the stress of trying to get the kids to do just a little schoolwork, the stress of being alone, the worries about job layoffs and cutbacks are affecting both men and women more and more. It’s true that some people use alcohol to relieve stress. Alcohol is a downer, so alcohol is a sedative. If you are all wound up and your heart’s beating and you’re stressed out, alcohol can definitely make those symptoms of stress go down. But at what cost?

The problem is alcohol interferes with your ability to make good decisions, and that’s a problem, particularly if you’re stressed. Alcohol increases the risk of conflict and domestic violence. And after all that, alcohol interferes with your sleep. It may make you sleepy originally, but it inhibits REM sleep. So often, people wake up at 2:00 or 3:00 at night, and they can’t get back to sleep. or they stay awake with their heart pounding.
Researchers tracked behaviors a week after the World Health Organization (WHO) announced the pandemic in mid-March. The concerns include feeling tired or having little energy, trouble sleeping and relaxing, and feeling hopeless and afraid,” said Shawna Lee, the report’s lead author and University of Michigan associate professor of social work. She collaborated on the report with social work doctoral student Kaitlin Ward. The sample included responses from 562 adults (both parents and nonparents) – many who indicated their depression and anxiety spiked several days or more in the previous two weeks.  

- Over 1 in 4 respondents knew someone who had been tested for Coronavirus, and approximately 1 in 9 respondents knew someone who had contracted Coronavirus.

- Symptoms of anxiety were even more common, with 50% or more reporting symptoms of anxiety nearly every day or several days a week since the Coronavirus pandemic. Approximately 32% of respondents had symptoms that would indicate mild anxiety, about 19% for moderate anxiety and 17% for severe anxiety.

- 28% of all respondents said they have used alcohol or other drugs to make themselves feel better. 22% said they were using alcohol more and 1 in 7 (14%) said they were using marijuana more.

Now, I'm a fan of numbers, so let's do the numbers. One serving is the 12-ounce bottle/can of beer or a one 5-ounce glass of wine or 1.5 ounces of spirits. Low risk drinking guidelines are no more than one drink per hour, two drinks per day or 3 drinks on any given day. And if you are taking any medication, this can also have a negative effect. Alcohol abuse is a pattern that's harmful to the drinker and others. Alcoholism is a disease marked by a compulsion to drink, inability to stop drinking once it started, and the need to consume more alcohol to get the same effect, to get high or to get relaxed, and this is called tolerance. Alcoholics may also suffer alcohol withdrawal symptoms, like nausea or shaking or anxiety.

So what do you do? Honestly, look at your alcohol consumption count. Count them up. Is it more than six a week? Is it more than ten a week? How big is your glass of wine? Ask yourself why you're drinking.

1. Have you ever decided to stop drinking for a week or so, but only lasted for a couple of days?
2. Do you wish people would mind their own business about your drinking-- stop telling you what to do?
3. Have you ever switched from one kind of drink to another in the hope that this would keep you from getting drunk?
4. Have you had to have an eye-opener upon awakening during the past year?
5. Do you envy people who can drink without getting into trouble?
6. Have you had problems connected with drinking during the past year?
7. Has your drinking caused trouble at home?
8. Are you being encouraged to drink by a manipulative partner?
9. Are you drinking to treat your stress, your depression, your boredom, your anxiety?
10. Do you tell yourself you can stop drinking any time you want to, even though you keep getting drunk when you don’t mean to?
11. Do you have "blackouts"?
12. Have you ever felt that your life would be better if you did not drink?

If you answered YES to five or more of these questions, reach out to your PCM or the Employee Assistance Program to talk about your alcohol use concerns. If you're not struggling with alcohol abuse, reach out to someone who may be struggling! There are people who need that call.

So all of you out there...stay safe, stay calm, stay sober. Take care of yourself and each other. :-)  
Call me if you need help or resources! Christine Robinson, 315-772-2597