



Alcohol Use

Make informed decisions about drinking by having the facts.



AMERICAN
COLLEGE
HEALTH
ASSOCIATION

How Much Do You Know about Alcohol?

In order to make informed decisions about alcohol use, it is important to understand how alcohol affects your body.

Is alcohol a sexual stimulant?

Alcohol decreases your ability to function sexually. Alcohol also limits your ability to communicate well, sometimes leading to unintended consequences (e.g., unintended pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections) and unwanted actions (e.g., sex without a barrier method of protection).

Is it ok to mix alcohol with other drugs?

Dangerous and potentially fatal reactions can occur when alcohol and drugs are used at the same time. This applies to both illicit substances and over-the-counter drugs: when mixed with alcohol, drugs like ibuprofen (Advil) or acetaminophen (Tylenol) can harm your liver.

Is drinking beer or wine less risky than drinking liquor?

Standard serving sizes—a 12 oz. beer or wine cooler, a 5 oz. glass of wine, and a 1.5 oz. shot of liquor—all contain roughly the same amount of alcohol, and your body needs the same amount of time to process the alcohol in each of these drinks. However, the amount of alcohol can vary in beverages—pay attention to the both the percentage of alcohol and the type of alcohol in your drink.

Is there a way to sober up quickly?

There is no way to speed up the rate at which your body processes alcohol—it takes time for your body to metabolize the alcohol, and the amount of time depends on how much alcohol has been consumed. A full stomach slows absorption of alcohol, water may help with dehydration, and coffee or a cold shower may wake you up, but none of these will keep or get you sober.

How much can you to drink without feeling any effects?

How alcohol impacts you depends on a number of factors, such as sex assigned at birth, weight, how fast you drink, and your mood. For instance, a woman's blood alcohol content (BAC, or the percentage of alcohol in your blood) will rise faster than that of a man, even when they are the same weight. How alcohol impacts you can also be affected by the amount of food you ate before and during drinking, your hormone levels, and medications you may have used.

Will mixing alcohol and energy drinks make you drunker?

While it won't make you drunker, the caffeine in energy drinks can hide the usual symptoms of being drunk, making it harder for you to recognize your level of intoxication. This could lead you to drink more than you normally would. There are other concerns with mixing a stimulant (like caffeine) with a depressant (alcohol): energy drinks can cause heart arrhythmia (when the heart speeds up and slows down), especially when consumed in conjunction with alcohol.

Minimizing the Impact of Alcohol

If you choose to drink, here are some tips to minimize the effects on your body:

- Have a plan. Do you want to consume alcohol at the event to which you are going, and if so, how much? It's always ok to choose not to drink.
- Do not pregame.
- Drink slowly—sip your drink and limit yourself to one per hour.
- Alternate non-alcoholic drinks, especially water, with those containing alcohol.
- Eat before and/or during drinking (protein-rich foods are especially good).
- Avoid salty foods (such as peanuts or popcorn) that make you want to drink more.
- Avoid spiked punch, other drinks containing unknown amounts of alcohol, and drinks with multiple shots and types of alcohol.
- Avoid drinks that contain caffeine, plant-based stimulants, and/or other additives that can mask the depressant effects of alcohol and may encourage you to drink more.
- Avoid drinking games, which may cause you to drink quickly and more than you planned.

Low Risk and Risky Drinking

Low risk drinkers:

- Do not use alcohol below the legal drinking age.
- Drink slowly—no gulping, drinking games, or pregameing and no more than one drink per hour.
- Eat healthy food before and/or while drinking.
- Never use alcohol with medications or when medical conditions indicate no use is safe.
- Never drive while or after drinking.

Risky drinkers:

- Use alcohol to become intoxicated.
- Use alcohol to solve a problem, relax, or manage emotions or situations.
- Experience personality changes—may become loud, angry, or violent, OR silent, remote, or reclusive.
- Drink when they should not—underage; before driving, going to class or work; or when medical conditions indicate no use is safe.
- Harm themselves, family, friends, and strangers.
- Keep drinking despite negative consequences.
- Have “blackouts”—cannot remember what they did while drinking although they may have appeared normal to people at the time.
- Change their academic, social, or work situation to accommodate alcohol use.
- Miss work or skip class as a result of hangovers or choosing to drink.

Those with alcohol dependence:

- Spend a lot of time thinking about drinking and planning where and when to get their next drink.
- Keep bottles of alcohol hidden.
- Start drinking without conscious planning and lose awareness of the amount consumed.
- Deny drinking or the amount consumed.
- Often drink alone.
- Feel the need to drink before stressful situations.
- May have “blackouts”—cannot remember what they did while drinking although they may have appeared normal to people at the time.
- Miss work or skip class as a result of hangovers or choosing to drink.
- Have or cause major problems with the police, an employer, family, or friends.
- Minimize negative academic, health, legal, or social consequences to alcohol use.

Warning Signs

Answer the following questions:

1. Are you unable to stop drinking after a certain number of drinks?
2. Do you need a drink to get motivated?
3. Do you often forget what happened while you were drinking?
4. Have others annoyed you by criticizing your alcohol use?
5. Have you been involved in fights while you were drinking?
6. Have you done or said anything while drinking that you later regretted?
7. Have you destroyed or damaged property while drinking?
8. Do you drive after drinking?
9. Have you been in trouble with campus authorities or the police because of your drinking?
10. Have you dropped or chosen friends based on their drinking habits?

11. Have you ever done poorly on an exam or assignment or missed classes because of drinking?
12. Does when and how you will get your next drink preoccupy your mind?
13. Do you feel guilty or self-conscious about your drinking?
14. Do you continue drinking despite continued negative consequences?

If you answered “yes” to three or more, or if your answer to any of the questions concerns you, you may be using alcohol in ways that are harmful. If you think you have or might be developing a drinking problem, please use the resources in this brochure to get help.

Consequences of Alcohol Use

If you drink before you are 21, you may face legal and academic consequences both on and off campus. Because alcohol impairs your mental and physical responses, driving under the influence (DUI) increases your chances of a traffic violation or crash and harming yourself or others.

For More Information

For more information about alcohol and alcohol use, visit your student health center, the health and wellness office, the campus collegiate recovery program, or one of the websites listed below.

Alcoholics Anonymous
212-870-3400
www.aa.org

National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence
www.ncadd.org

Alateen and Al-Anon Family Groups
Meeting Information Line:
888-4AL-ANON (425-2666)
www.al-anon.org

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism
www.niaaa.nih.gov

College Drinking Prevention: Resources for Students
www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/ParentsandStudents/Students/Default.aspx

Take a free online anonymous screening at
www.alcoholscreening.org

American College Health Association
(410) 859-1500 | www.acha.org

© Copyright February 2019.

This brochure is for informational purposes only and is not meant to replace consultation with your health care provider. The information in this brochure does not constitute medical advice and should not be the basis for any diagnosis or treatment.