

NO MATTER WHAT YOUR AGE...

ALCOHOL IS A DRUG...

Alcohol is a *depressant*, which slows down thinking and actions. It acts on the brain and affects all parts of the body. An average-size adult's liver can break down about one drink per hour; the rest of the alcohol circulates throughout the body, affecting behavior, judgment, perception, and motor skills--such as driving and operating machinery.



ALCOHOL AFFECTS EACH INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENTLY...

Smaller-size people, women, younger or older people, and those who are ill will feel *stronger effects* from the same amount of alcohol than larger people, middle-aged adults, or people who are in good physical health. People with a history of alcoholism in their families might also be affected differently than people whose families have no history of alcoholism.

ALCOHOL ABUSE IS A HEALTH RISK...

Abuse of alcohol can *cause damage* to many of the body's organs. Researchers report damage to brain tissue, heart muscle, and reproductive organs in both males and females. Alcohol may cause the drinker's blood pressure to rise, putting him or her at risk for heart attack and stroke. Stomach ulcers, poor nutrition, and sexual dysfunction have all been related to alcohol use. **There is no known safe level of alcohol use for those under the age of 21.**

ALCOHOL AFFECTS DRIVING SKILLS...

Alcohol is involved in roughly one-half of all *fatal car crashes* in the U.S. Although many states consider a driver legally intoxicated when the Blood Alcohol Content (BAC) reaches .08 %, driving skills are affected at levels as low as .03 %. This is especially true of younger drivers, who may be less experienced. Alcohol affects crucial driving skills like quick reflexes and vision.

ALCOHOL IS HARMFUL TO UNBORN BABIES...

Alcohol consumed by a *pregnant woman* can enter the bloodstream of the fetus she is carrying. Alcohol may affect the fetus in many ways; slowing both physical and mental growth before and after birth, causing severe physical malformations of the face and brain, creating learning disabilities or retardation. *The safe choice is not to drink any alcohol during pregnancy.*

ALCOHOL REACTS WITH OTHER DRUGS...

Consuming alcohol with certain over-the-counter or prescription drugs is dangerous. Drinking while taking medications may cause impairment of coordination, a sharp change in blood pressure, seizures, convulsions, and even death. Ask your doctor or pharmacist about how a certain medication reacts with alcohol before combining alcohol with other drugs.

ALCOHOL ABUSE CAN LEAD TO ALCOHOLISM...

Drinking large enough amounts of alcohol over a period of time can produce alcoholism, a physical dependence on alcohol. People with a history of alcoholism in their family are at much greater risk of developing alcoholism themselves. Alcoholism is a treatable illness; family members and friends may need to obtain help, too.

MORE FACTS:

- Alcoholism is one of the most serious public health problems in the U.S. today. Among the 18.3 million adult "heavier drinkers," 12.1 million have one or more symptoms of alcoholism, *an increase of 8.2 % since 1980.*
- One out of three American adults--56 million Americans--says that alcohol abuse has brought trouble to his/her family.
- Chronic brain injury caused by alcohol is second only to Alzheimer's disease as a known cause of mental deterioration in adults.
- About 65 out of every 100 persons in the U.S. will be in an alcohol-related car crash in their lifetimes.
- 54% of jail inmates convicted of violent crimes were drinking before they committed the offense.
- Over 80% of college presidents *identify alcohol abuse as the biggest problem on their campuses.*
- If a man and woman of similar weight drink the same amount of alcohol, 30% more alcohol will enter the woman's bloodstream, because women have less of a certain stomach enzyme (dehydrogenase) that digests alcohol.

~ Nebraska Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse and the Lincoln Council on Alcoholism & Drugs