

# Health News

## THIS MONTH - Alcohol Awareness

### Alcohol is the most commonly used drug

When alcohol is used in moderation it is relatively safe, but excess usage can cause you physical damage and expose you and others to unnecessary risks.

Learn the difference between safe and unsafe drinking and plan how to have fun and minimize the risks to you and others.

88 percent of recorded adult alcohol consumption is spirit based (source WHO).

### Drinking and health: worldwide

**Alcohol misuse kills more than 2.5 million people every year.**

One third die from injuries:

- Accidental injuries: Car crash, fall, drowning, etc
- Intentional injuries: Homicide, suicide, etc.

Two thirds die from disease caused by alcohol:

- Liver, brain, heart, cancer, pancreas, etc.



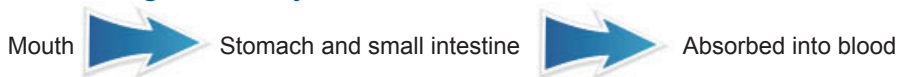
Alcohol consumption causes more than 60 types of disease and injury.  
Source: World Health Organization.

### Some facts about alcohol

- The drug is ethyl alcohol (ethanol)
- Alcohol is made when yeast, sugars or starches are fermented.
- Alcohol affects every organ in your body.
- Alcohol is a *depressant* - it slows your brain. This can affect your:
  - Perceptions
  - Emotions
  - Decision-making ability
  - Movement, vision, hearing

**These changes are called INTOXICATION**

### Alcohol gets into your blood



Alcohol is quickly absorbed from the stomach and small intestine. The blood stream takes the alcohol to every organ. The effects are at first most obvious on your brain (intoxication / drunkenness). As the amount in your blood increases, so does your level of intoxication / drunkenness.

**The amount of alcohol circulating in your blood is called your "Blood Alcohol Content" (BAC).**

### The liver removes alcohol from the blood

The liver removes alcohol from the blood and can 'clear' about one serving of alcohol per hour.

Alcohol consumption per hour	Effect on "Blood Alcohol Content"
a) More than one serving	Increases
b) One serving	Remains steady
c) Less than one serving	Decreases

### Healthy bites



Below are some tips for using alcohol wisely:



#### Drink in moderation:

Women - not more than one drink a day  
Men - not more than two drinks per day



**Drink less:** set daily and weekly limits, drink slowly, space the drinks out, alternate alcohol drinks with non-alcohol drinks



**Eat before you drink,** and while drinking



Consider avoiding alcohol if you are already tired.

### Links to other resources

World Health Organization  
**Alcohol facts**  
[http://www.who.int/topics/alcohol\\_drinking/en/](http://www.who.int/topics/alcohol_drinking/en/)

US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
**Alcohol and Public Health**  
<http://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/index.htm>



## Alcohol and organ damage

Alcohol affects every organ in your body. There are many effects of long-term alcohol abuse. The more someone drinks, the higher the risk. BUT even occasional heavy drinking can damage health.

### The liver

- Fatty liver, alcoholic hepatitis, cirrhosis (cannot be reversed, often fatal) and liver cancer risk increased

### The brain and nervous system

- Brain damage / brain shrinkage, seizures / epilepsy, memory loss, coordination problems and mental illness

### The cardiovascular system

- High blood pressure, stroke, heart failure, heart attack, weakened heart muscle and high cholesterol

### Cancer

- Increases the risk of many cancers including: mouth / throat / voice box / esophagus / liver / colon / breasts

## Alcohol *may* have some positive health effects

The relationship between alcohol consumption and cardiovascular diseases is complex.

Studies are underway to see if it might:

- Reduce heart disease risk
- Decrease chances of dying of a heart attack
- Lessen risk of some strokes

These benefits are possibly seen with light to moderate drinking only. If someone uses alcohol more heavily, the risks - including heart and stroke risks outweigh any benefits.

## Test Your Knowledge

1. Of all of the organs in the body, alcohol only affects the liver.  
True / False
2. Alcohol affects your perception, emotions, decision-making, vision and movement.  
True / False
3. The liver can clear three servings of alcohol in an hour.  
True / False
4. Occasional heavy drinking does not cause any health effects.  
True / False
5. You can safely leave someone which has been drinking heavily and is unconscious as long as they are lying face up.  
True / False

Answers: 1.F 2.T 3.F 4.F 5.F

## Alcohol abuse and alcoholism

The term *alcohol abuse* usually means any pattern of drinking that causes harm to health, relationships, or quality of life.

Some signs of alcohol abuse:

- Failure to fulfill major responsibilities at work, school, or home.
- Drinking in dangerous situations, such as drinking while driving.
- Legal problems related to alcohol.
- Continued drinking despite relationship problems that are caused (or worsened by) drinking.

*Alcoholism* is a term used when there is physical or psychological dependence on alcohol. Some signs of this chronic disease:

- "Needing" a drink (strong cravings).
- Inability to limit drinking.
- Feeling guilty about drinking, hiding the behavior.

If you or someone you know has an alcohol problem, help is available.

## When someone you know is intoxicated

If someone.....

- Vomits
- Passes out
- Cannot balance
- Slurs their speech
- Is short of breath
- Has an abnormal body temperature

....these are signs their body cannot handle the alcohol in their system.

- Do not give them more alcohol
- Find a quiet place to sit and relax
- Offer beverages and food (to make them more comfortable, but this will not 'get them sober')
- Watch for signs of alcohol poisoning

## MEDICAL EMERGENCY:

### Alcohol poisoning can be fatal

Do not leave an intoxicated person alone if they.....

- Will not wake up
- Their skin is cold/clammy/unusually pale
- Have a blue look to their lips or nails
- Are breathing slowly or irregularly
- Vomit without waking up

.....they may have alcohol poisoning.

- Call for medical help
- Keep trying to wake the person up
- Turn on their side to prevent choking on vomit
- Monitor their breathing closely

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