

ALCOHOL = DANGEROUS DRUG

Alcohol is so common in today's culture that most of us hardly notice its presence. It shows up in TV commercials, provides a source of humor in movies and television shows, and is present in many homes. Sporting events, restaurants, and parties usually feature beer or wine, and unfortunately some of this alcohol makes its way to people who are under the legal drinking age. Besides the fact that drinking underage is illegal, alcohol is a drug that has many very serious effects on the bodies and brains of those who drink it.

Don't be deceived by alcohol's advertising image; make sure you know exactly what you are doing by allowing this powerful drug to influence and affect you.



WHAT IS ALCOHOL?

The substance that we typically refer to as "alcohol" in beer, wine, and other alcoholic beverages is actually **ethanol**. Ethanol is a colorless liquid that is produced by the fermenting of grains, fruits, vegetables, or any other source that contains sugar. This liquid is classified as a psychoactive drug, meaning its primary active chemicals take control of certain nervous system functions. The amount of ethanol in a person's system is measured as a **blood alcohol content** (BAC) percentage. 0.1% BAC is enough to cause negative effects like vomiting and impaired motor skills. 0.5% BAC is a lethal dose in most cases.

EFFECTS ON THE HEART AND LIVER

Heavy drinking damages the muscle structure of the heart, increasing the risk of heart failure. It has also been connected with an increased risk of stroke.

One of the best known long term health risks of drinking alcohol is liver cancer. Because the liver is responsible for filtering toxic substances out of the body's system, it is forced to work overtime when the body ingests alcohol. Years of overuse cause irreparable harm, leading to liver failure and incurable cancer.

Alcohol is a drug that has many very serious effects on the bodies and brains of those who drink it.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Go to **www.intheknowzone.com** for more information on substance abuse. Increase your knowledge using the information, statistics, images, and links. Test your understanding with a quick quiz.

**Don't stay in the dark.
Get In the Know!**

in the know

© 2012 Education Specialty Publishing, LLC
P.O. Box 6986 Metairie, LA 70009 • 877-329-0578
www.ESPublish.com • product #PB-DA181
This pamphlet may not be copied.

ALCOHOL

*how it affects
the body*





EFFECTS ON THE BRAIN

The short-term effects of a small dose of alcohol are a false sense of relaxation and decreased inhibitions. This altered mood may “feel good,” but it is actually dangerous in many ways. Most of your natural inhibitions are defenses put up by your body to protect you from danger. People under the influence of alcohol are highly likely to wander into dangerous situations, say stupid things, and engage in activities that carry heavy, lifelong consequences. Oddly enough, they also become less able to figure out how intoxicated they are, causing them to drink even more.

A larger dose of alcohol incapacitates the brain’s functions, making it impossible to perform simple tasks like walking in a straight line. At some point, the brain simply shuts down and the person loses consciousness.

Over the long term, research has connected heavy alcohol consumption with dementia.

ALCOHOLISM

Alcoholism (addiction to alcohol) takes a powerful hold on the mind of a heavy drinker, making it difficult for him to quit drinking without suffering dangerous, even potentially fatal, withdrawal symptoms.

Unfortunately, television and movies have made alcoholism a joke, portraying drunk people as bumbling but lovable and harmless. The truth is that addiction to alcohol, like addiction to any other drug, is a mental condition that takes complete control of the entire body. It takes priority over an alcoholic’s job, relationships, safety, health, and every other part of his life, usually leading to the loss of most of them. Alcoholism is not just a scare tactic invented by prevention groups; it is a fact that ruins the lives of millions of people.

We now know that inherited genes make some individuals more susceptible to alcoholism than others. This means that, without even knowing it, you might be more likely to become addicted to alcohol than your friends. Just because a friend drinks without becoming addicted does not mean that you would be able to as well.



ASSOCIATED CONSEQUENCES

As devastating as these diseases and damage are, there are consequences associated with alcohol that are even more deadly and immediate:

Drunk driving. As soon as someone sits behind the wheel of a car after drinking alcohol, he creates an incredibly hazardous situation for himself and everyone around him. In the blink of an eye, he can lose his own life or cost the life of an innocent person in an accident. The impairment and slowed reaction time caused by alcohol’s psychoactive effects make it impossible for an intoxicated person to safely drive a car or any other motorized vehicle. This is why an arrest for drunk driving leads to mandatory penalties, and usually a jail sentence.

School. Because alcohol has such a dramatic effect on the brain’s ability to function, it impairs the ability of students to excel in school. Despite the popular image of hard-drinking college students, the truth is that most of those students last only a year or less before dropping out. Sports are obviously impossible for a student who has his coordination and motor skills compromised by alcohol.

liver cancer



Relationship problems. Many people wake up after a night of drinking, only to find that they injured someone else– even someone very close to them– while they were intoxicated. Domestic violence and assault and battery are very common charges brought against individuals who intended nothing other than to have a good time with some friends.

Professional interaction. An arrest for DUI or public intoxication makes it difficult for someone to later get hired for a new job or obtain a loan for a house or car. The social stigma attached to drunkenness is very serious, even though drinking itself is treated casually.

Opening a beer carries all of these risks with it. No one starts drinking to become an alcoholic or get liver cancer. However, these consequences far outweigh the hype and false image that alcohol is good, clean fun. Do yourself a favor: steer clear of booze.

The truth is that addiction to alcohol, like addiction to any other drug, is a mental condition that takes complete control of the entire body.