

Tips for Teens: The Truth About Alcohol

**Slang--Booze, Sauce, Brews, Brewskis,
Hooch, Hard Stuff, Juice**

Get The Facts...

Alcohol affects your brain. Drinking alcohol leads to a loss of coordination, poor judgment, slowed reflexes, distorted vision, memory lapses, and even blackouts.

Alcohol affects your body. Alcohol can damage every organ in your body. It is absorbed directly into your bloodstream and can increase your risk for a variety of life-threatening diseases, including cancer.

Alcohol affects your self-control. Alcohol depresses your central nervous system, lowers your inhibitions, and impairs your judgment. Drinking can lead to risky behaviors, including having unprotected sex. This may expose you to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases or cause unwanted pregnancy.

Alcohol can kill you. Drinking large amounts of alcohol can lead to coma or even death. Also, in 1998, 35.8 percent of traffic deaths of 15- to 20-year-olds were alcohol-related.

Alcohol can hurt you--even if you're not the one drinking. If you're around people who are drinking, you have an increased risk of being seriously injured, involved in car crashes, or affected by violence. At the very least, you may have to deal with people who are sick, out of control, or unable to take care of themselves.

Before You Risk It...

Know the law. It is illegal to buy or possess alcohol if you are under 21.

Get the facts. One drink can make you fail a breath test. In some states, people under the age of 21 who are found to have any amount of alcohol in their systems can lose their driver's license, be subject to a heavy fine, or have their car permanently taken away.

Stay informed. "Binge" drinking means having five or more drinks on one occasion. About 15 percent of teens are binge drinkers in any given month.

Know the risks. Mixing alcohol with medications or illicit drugs is extremely dangerous and can lead to accidental death. For example, alcohol-medication interactions may be a factor in at least 25 percent of emergency room admissions.

Keep your edge. Alcohol can make you gain weight and give you bad breath.

Look around you. Most teens aren't drinking alcohol. Research shows that 70 percent of people 12-20 haven't had a drink in the past month.

Know The Signs...

How can you tell if a friend has a drinking problem? Sometimes it's tough to tell. But there are signs you can look for. If your friend has one or more of the following warning signs, he or she may have a problem with alcohol:

- Getting drunk on a regular basis
- Lying about how much alcohol he or she is using
- Believing that alcohol is necessary to have fun
- Having frequent hangovers
- Feeling run-down, depressed, or even suicidal
- Having "blackouts"--forgetting what he or she did while drinking
- Having problems at school or getting in trouble with the law

What can you do to help someone who has a drinking problem? Be a real friend. You might even save a life. Encourage your friend to stop or seek professional help.

Q & A

Q. Aren't beer and wine "safer" than liquor?

A. No. One 12-ounce beer has about as much alcohol as a 1.5-ounce shot of liquor, a 5-ounce glass of wine, or a wine cooler.

Q. Why can't teens drink if their parents can?

A. Teens' bodies are still developing and alcohol has a greater impact on their physical and mental well-being. For example, people who begin drinking before age 15 are four times more likely to develop alcoholism than those who begin at age 21.

Q. How can I say no to alcohol? I'm afraid I won't fit in.

A. Remember, you're in good company. The majority of teens don't drink alcohol. Also, it's not as hard to refuse as you might think. Try: "No thanks," "I don't drink," or "I'm not interested."

Info

To learn more about alcohol or obtain referrals to programs in your community, contact:

Nebraska's Alcohol and Drug Information Clearinghouse
800-648-4444 | Web site: www.prevlink.org

The bottom line: If you know someone who has a problem with alcohol, urge him or her to stop or get help. If you drink--stop! The longer you ignore the real facts, the more chances you take with your life.

It's never too late. Talk to your parents, a doctor, a counselor, a teacher, or another adult you trust. Do it today!

Footnotes

1. Fatality Analysis Reporting System. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 1998.
2. 1998 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), 1998.
3. Holder, H.D. Effects of Alcohol, Alone and in Combination with Medications. Walnut Creek, CA: Prevention Research Center, 1992.
4. 1998 National Household Survey. (SAMHSA), 1998.
5. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism press release. January 14, 1998.