



Alcohol

Street names: Booze, Brew, Liquor

Provided by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

EXPAND ALL

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What are alcohol use disorders?

Also known as: Booze, Brew, Liquor, and Sauce

Alcohol use disorders (AUDs) are medical conditions that doctors diagnose when someone's drinking causes them distress or harm.

What is a standard drink?

Many people are surprised to learn what counts as a drink. The amount of liquid in your glass, can, or bottle is not necessarily equal to how much alcohol is in your drink. A standard drink is:

- 12 ounces of beer (about 5% alcohol)
- 8 ounces of malt liquor – beer with a high alcohol content (about 7% alcohol)
- 5 ounces of table wine (about 12% alcohol)

- 1.5 ounces (a “shot”) of liquor, like gin, rum, vodka, tequila, or whiskey (about 40% alcohol)

No level of drinking is safe or legal for anyone under age 21, but unfortunately many teens drink—and they often drink multiple drinks, which is very dangerous.

How does alcohol affect the teenage brain?

When teens drink, alcohol affects their brains in the short-term– but repeated drinking can also impact it down the road, especially as their brains grow and develop.

Short-Term Consequences of Intoxication (being “drunk”):

- An intoxicated person has a harder time making good decisions.
- A person is less aware that his/her behavior may be inappropriate or risky.
- A person may be more likely to engage in risky behavior, including drinking and driving, sexual activity (like unprotected sex) and aggressive or violent behavior.
- A person is less likely to recognize potential danger.

Long-Term Consequences as the Teen Brain Develops:

- Research shows that drinking during the teen years could interfere with normal brain development and change the brain in ways that:
 - Have negative effects on information processing and learning.
 - Increase the risk of developing an alcohol use disorder later in life.

How does alcohol affect your body?

People who drink are affected even before they show signs of being drunk, especially when it comes to decision-making abilities.

At first, alcohol causes people to feel upbeat and excited. But this is temporary and they shouldn’t be fooled.

If drinking continues, the effects on the body—and the potential risks—multiply. Here's what can happen:

- **Inhibitions and memory:** People may say and do things that they will regret later, or possibly not remember at all. Inhibitions are lost - leading to poor decision making.
- **Decision-making skills:** When they drink, individuals are more likely to be impulsive. They may be at greater risk for having an alcohol-related traffic crash, getting into fights, or making unwise decisions about sex.
- **Coordination and physical control:** When drinking leads to loss of balance, slurred speech, and blurred vision, even normal activities can become more dangerous.
- **Death:** Drinking too much alcohol can also lead to death. If people drink too much, they will eventually get sleepy and pass out. Reflexes like gagging and breathing can be suppressed. That means they could vomit and choke, or stop breathing completely.

And finally, it's easy to misjudge how long alcohol's effects last. Alcohol continues to affect the brain and body long after the last drink has been finished. Even after someone stops drinking, alcohol in the stomach and intestine continues to enter the bloodstream, impairing judgment and coordination for hours.

What are the negative consequences of underage drinking?

There are increased risks and a range of negative consequences related to underage drinking. It is dangerous because it:

- **Causes many deaths.**

On average, alcohol plays a role in the deaths of 4,358 young people under age 21 every year. These deaths include:

- 1,580 deaths from car crashes
- 1,269 from murders
- 245 from alcohol poisoning, falls, burns, and drowning
- 492 from suicides

- **Causes many injuries.**

Drinking alcohol can cause young people to have accidents and get hurt. In 2011 alone,

about 188,000 people under age 21 visited an emergency room for injuries related to drinking alcohol.

- **Increases the risk of physical and sexual assault.**

Young people under age 21 who drink are more likely to carry out or be the victim of a physical or sexual assault after drinking than others their age who do not drink.

- **Can lead to other problems.**

Drinking can cause teens to have trouble in school or with the law. Teens who drink are more likely to use other drugs than teens who don't.

- **Can lead to developing an alcohol use disorder.**

Alcohol Use Disorders (AUDs) are medical conditions that doctors diagnose when someone's drinking causes them distress or harm. In 2014 about 679,000 young people ages 12-17 had an AUD. Even more important, the younger the use of alcohol the more likely one is to develop an AUD later in life.

- **Increases the risk of cancer.**

Drinking alcohol increases your risk of developing various cancers, including cancers of the mouth, esophagus, pharynx, larynx, liver, and breast.

What is alcohol poisoning and how can I help someone who may be suffering from it?

Alcohol poisoning occurs when there is so much alcohol in a person's bloodstream that areas of the brain controlling basic life-support systems—such as breathing, heart rate, and temperature control—begin to shut down.

Symptoms of alcohol poisoning include:

- Confusion
- Difficulty remaining conscious
- Vomiting
- Seizures

- Trouble with breathing
- Slow heart rate
- Clammy skin
- Dulled responses, such as no gag reflex (which prevents choking)
- Extremely low body temperature
- Death.

If you suspect someone has alcohol poisoning, call 911 and get medical help immediately. Cold showers, hot coffee, or walking will NOT reverse the effects of alcohol overdose and could actually make things worse.

What is an alcohol blackout?

An alcohol blackout is a gap in a person's memory for events that took place while he or she was drinking. When a blackout happens, a person's brain does not create memories for these events as they are happening. For people who have had a blackout, it can be frightening to wake up the next day and not remember what they did the night before.

Is underage drinking a serious health problem?

Underage drinking is drinking alcohol before a person turns age 21, which is the minimum legal drinking age in the United States. Underage drinking is a serious problem, as you may have seen from your friends' or your own experiences. Alcohol is the most commonly used substance of abuse among young people in America, and drinking when you're underage puts your health and safety at risk.

Why do teens drink alcohol?

Teens drink for a variety of reasons. Some teens want to experience new things. Others feel pressured into drinking by peers. And some are looking for a way to cope with stress or other problems. Unfortunately, drinking will only make any problems a person has already worse, not better.

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