

Alcohol Consumption & the College Student



Alcohol: The Basics

You may already know that the concentration of alcohol in different drinks can vary a lot. Beer, for example, is about 4.5 percent alcohol, while wine and champagne are about 11-12 percent alcohol. Distilled spirits (aka hard stuff like rum, gin, vodka, whiskey) range from 40 to 95 percent alcohol. Most typical spirits are 40 percent, although there are highly concentrated forms of rum and whiskey (75 to 90 percent). Since not all drinks are the same, it's important to know the difference. A 12 ounce bottle of beer, a 5 ounce glass of wine, and a mixed drink with one shot of typical hard stuff have about the same amount of alcohol.

What happens when alcohol enters the body?

About 20 percent of the alcohol is absorbed in the stomach and about 80 percent in the small intestine. Several things influence how fast alcohol is absorbed, including:

- Concentration of alcohol - the greater the concentration, the faster it's absorbed.
- Whether the stomach is full or empty - food slows down absorption.
- Type of drink - carbonated beverages speed up absorption. So, champagne and anything with a mixer such as club soda or tonic water will be absorbed faster than, say, a glass of wine. Having a soft drink after drinking alcohol will also increase absorption.
- Rate of drinking - the faster you drink, the faster the absorption.
- Mood - stress and tension can cause the stomach to dump its contents, so that alcohol gets absorbed more rapidly.

Once absorbed, alcohol enters the blood and is carried through the body, where it dissolves in the water of each tissue of the body and has its effect. The only tissue that alcohol does not affect is fat, since it can't dissolve in fat, only water. This is one reason why women are typically more affected than men are by the same amount of alcohol. Men generally have more muscle and less fat than women. Because muscle tissue has more water than fat tissue, a given dose of alcohol will be diluted more in a man than a woman. So, the alcohol concentration in the blood will be higher in the woman, so that she feels the effects of the alcohol sooner.

Alcohol leaves the body in three ways: (1) **kidneys** eliminate about five percent of alcohol in urine; (2) **Lungs** exhale about five percent, which is what is detected by breathalyzer tests; and (3) the **liver** chemically breaks down the remaining alcohol with the enzyme, alcohol dehydrogenase. An average person can get rid of approximately 0.5 ounces (15 ml) of alcohol per hour. So it would take about one hour to eliminate the alcohol from a 12 ounce beer. Blood alcohol content (BAC) increases when the body absorbs alcohol faster than it can eliminate it.

So what's the bottom line? Having several drinks in an hour will increase your BAC much more than limiting it to one drink over an hour or more. If you drink, know what you're putting into your body and what's going to happen to it!



Alcohol & The Brain

You've probably seen a person who has had too much to drink and you probably also know that the effects of alcohol can vary from person to person. Some people get more social after drinking, others become emotional or shy. Some slur words and have trouble walking, while others forget the name of the hottie they met an hour earlier. How a person reacts to alcohol depends on the amount consumed, the person's history with alcohol, and his or her personality. Most of the effects of alcohol originate in the brain.

Alcohol disrupts communication between nerve cells in the brain. Alcohol affects various centers in the brain, including higher-order areas that control thinking and judgment, and lower-order areas that regulate basic body functions, like breathing, heart rate, and temperature. Higher-order centers are more sensitive to alcohol than the lower order centers. As blood alcohol content (BAC) increases, more parts of the brain are affected.

The highest order area of the brain, the **cerebral cortex**, is involved in thinking, processing information from the senses (e.g., taste, touch, smell, sound), and initiating voluntary muscle movements (e.g., walking in a straight line). In addition to disrupting judgment and clear thinking, alcohol depresses inhibitory centers in the cortex so that a person becomes more talkative and less inhibited. Alcohol also slows down information processing so that a person has trouble with vision, hearing, taste, touch, and smell. Effects get worse with more and more alcohol.

The **hippocampus** and septal areas of the **limbic system** control emotions and memory. Alcohol produces exaggerated emotions (e.g., anger, sadness) and memory loss. The **hypothalamus**, also part of the limbic system, coordinates functions associated with sex. Alcohol depresses nerve centers that control sexual arousal and performance, making it hard for guys to get an erection even if they're totally turned on. Through the hypothalamus, alcohol also reduces the level of anti-diuretic hormone (ADH), a hormone that causes the kidney to reabsorb water. End result: Needing to urinate like a proverbial racehorse. This loss of water results in **dehydration**. Alcohol can lead to severe dehydration, particularly if combined with other medications or drugs, such as MDMA (Ecstasy).

The **cerebellum** coordinates muscle movements and balance. Alcohol affecting this part of the brain makes it difficult for a person to do things associated with fine movements, like touching your nose with your finger or standing up straight.

The **medulla**, or brain stem, controls all of the body functions you don't have to think about, like breathing, heart rate, temperature, and consciousness. When the level of alcohol is high enough to affect this area, a person will breathe slowly or stop breathing altogether, and both blood pressure and body temperature will fall. A BAC high enough to affect the brain stem can be fatal.



Signs Of Trouble

Sometimes when you're at school and it seems like everyone is partying, it's easy to go from having too much fun to having a problem. So when does "drinking too much" become something more serious? The boundaries between having a cold one with the bros and tipping before class are fuzzy. It's important to know the signs of trouble.

There are two general categories of alcohol disorders, **alcohol abuse** and **alcohol dependence**. Alcohol abuse is characterized by the experience of recurrent alcohol-related negative consequences, such as drinking under hazardous conditions (e.g., drinking and driving), school or work problems (e.g., decreased grades, missed classes, suspension, fired from job), difficulties in relationships (e.g., frequent fights, conflict with family, friends, lovers, and/or co-workers), and recurrent legal problems due to alcohol (e.g., violation of campus alcohol policy,

disorderly conduct arrests). An alcohol abuse diagnosis is warranted when there is repeated occurrence of any one of these problems over the course of a year.

Alcohol dependence (a.k.a. alcoholism) is characterized by three or more of the following seven criteria:

1. Needing more and more alcohol to get the same buzz (this is called **tolerance**)
2. Drinking more or longer than you initially planned
3. Continuing to drink even when you know it causes you problems
4. Spending a lot of time on drinking related activities (e.g., keg parties, pub nights, bars with friends)
5. Trying to cut down or stop and not being able to
6. Giving up important social or recreational activities (e.g., sports, clubs, friends, etc.)
7. Feeling sick when you DON'T drink (this is called **withdrawal**)

Alcohol abuse and dependence are not rare phenoms among college students. A recent study showed that six percent of students meet criteria for alcohol dependence, and about one out of three students (33%) meet criteria for alcohol abuse. And more than 2 out of every 5 students report at least one symptom, increasing their risk for developing a full-blown alcohol disorder. The risk is also higher if you're a frequent binge drinker (5 or more in a row for guys; 4 or more for women) or have a history of alcoholism in your family. In fact, one out of five adult Americans (or 20%) has an alcoholic family member. This means that many of your college friends either lived with an alcoholic growing up, or know someone who did.

Despite the prevalence of true alcohol disorders on campuses, only about six percent of students actually seek help, either because they don't recognize the problem or they're ashamed or embarrassed. A person doesn't have to meet the criteria for an all out alcohol disorder to be in trouble with alcohol. If beer or tequila is running your life, that may be all the sign you need.

If you have a friend who's gone from nice guy to booze hound, or sophisticated to slutty because of alcohol, you may want to let him or her know you're worried and support them in getting help. That's what friends are all about. Most campus health centers have staff and programs specifically for alcohol and other drug use problems. And if any of the signs above sound familiar to you, it couldn't hurt to contact your campus health center to see what resources are

available for help. Don't wait. It's about your future.



Body Works

You may already know first-hand that alcohol can do more than make you feel woozy. Even relatively moderate doses of alcohol can create havoc throughout the body. Here's the scoop on how alcohol affects other parts of the body.

Gastrointestinal System

Short term: Irritates the lining of the **stomach** and **intestines**. Increases secretions of stomach acids. Blocks the absorption of essential nutrients.

Long term: Ulcers; cancer; anemia

Circulatory System

Short term: Decreases **blood pressure**, pulse, and respiration. Increases blood flow to the skin, causing a person to **sweat** and look flushed. This results in **loss of body heat**, which can lead to a decrease in body temperature. Reduces blood flow to muscles, leading to **muscle aches** (particularly with hangover).

Long term: Chronic **high blood pressure**; **heart disease**.

Immune System

Short term: Weakens body's ability to fight off infectious diseases. Increases number of **colds** and **flus**.

Long term: Increased susceptibility to infectious diseases and **cancer**.



Sociability Myths

Whether it's a few beers to loosen up, or drinking while hanging out with friends, lots of students drink to be more social. While alcohol may decrease your inhibitions and make it seem easier to talk to Johnny football hero, or the hot guitar player chick, it can also make it far less likely you'll have anything interesting to say.

Check out these myths about how Tequila gets you talking:

MYTH: Alcohol makes you funnier.

FACT: Alcohol typically doesn't make a person any funnier, though it may help a person act like a moron. It's fun to feel like you're the life of the party, but it's no fun to have people talking behind your back about how ridiculous you look dancing on the bar.

MYTH: Alcohol makes you more relaxed.

FACT: Alcohol reduces inhibitions, so it's natural that a person feels more at ease under the influence. Whether that's a good or a bad thing depends on how you handle it. Feeling more relaxed may cause you to take risks you wouldn't normally take, whether that means rounding home plate with a new partner, or just getting up the courage to ask out that hot guy or girl. Since alcohol makes it more likely that a person will be clumsy, smell like beer, and slur speech, it also makes it more likely that they'll find themselves sitting alone on the bench. The best bet for everything from success in the sack, to intelligent, witty conversation, is staying sober.

MYTH: Alcohol makes you more sociable.

FACT: It may seem like the heaviest drinkers are the popular people at social events, but when you take a closer look, they're usually just the loudest or the most willing to do stupid things. Maybe the girl who can't keep her shirt on is going to be popular, but being the least inhibited is not the same as being the most social. Look around and you'll probably find that those people who aren't too loaded or aren't drinking at all are having the most fun.



Alcohol & Club Drugs

You've all heard someone's parents' say it, that one little phrase: It was different back then. Maybe so, but the fact is many college kids are trying to outdo the partying of those bell-bottomed days by doing drugs. And many kids are ramping up drug use in serious ways, often without knowing just what they're getting into. At raves and clubs, students are popping stuff way more potent than pot. Popular drugs include MDMA (Ecstasy), Gammahydroxybutyrate (GHB), Rohypnol (Roofies), Ketamine (Special K), Methamphetamines, and LSD. In addition to the "high" or altered state of consciousness from these drugs, the reported attraction is anything from an increase in sexy feelings and dancing endurance, to a boost in energy level and decreased appetite.

While some of the risks of club drugs have been well-publicized, what you may not know is that

their use in combination with alcohol or other medications can fry your brain faster than the egg in the frying pan on TV during the '80s. Mixing and matching meds or alcohol with street drugs can quicken and compound the drug's effects to dangerous levels. Not only can a drug/alcohol combination cause serious physical consequences, the behavioral changes caused by alcohol and other drugs can make it difficult to judge when medical assistance is needed.

What are some of the effects of club drugs?

While some people think of MDMA as the "happy drug", the effects can make you far from happy. Recent research links ecstasy use to long term changes to the parts of the brain that control thought, memory, and pleasure. Studies show that just one hit of Ecstasy can lead to permanent changes in the brain. And it's not much of a "love drug" either; one of its main effects is to make it more difficult for a guy to get it up. Ecstasy can also cause muscle tension, teeth clenching, nausea, blurred vision, faintness, and chills or sweating. Couple alcohol with Ecstasy and you're at risk for SEVERE dehydration - the kind that can kill you.

Ketamine is an animal tranquilizer. Mixing this drug with alcohol is extremely dangerous and since the drug is an analgesic (pain suppressor), a user can be seriously injured without knowing it. High doses can lead to breathing difficulties and heart failure. GHB and Rohypnol are sedatives that cause muscle relaxation, sometimes to the point of temporary paralysis and breathing difficulties. These drugs are most commonly known as "date rape" or "predatory" drugs. Because they're colorless and odorless, sexual predators can secretly drop them into a drink and then take advantage of the person. These drugs render the victim incapable of resisting sexual advances and can cause the person to black out the attack. They are also metabolized quickly so there may be little physical evidence. Since both of these drugs are depressants, they can be lethal when in combination with alcohol.

To decrease your risk of being drugged:

- Drink from tamper-proof bottles and cans and insist on opening them.
- Insist on pouring or watching while any drink is mixed or prepared. Don't drink from group drinks such as punch bowls.
- Keep an eye on your drink or open soda can, don't trust someone to watch it for you.
- If you think you've been drugged, don't be afraid to seek medical attention.
- If someone passes out and you suspect predatory drugs, call for medical attention immediately.



Alcohol & Sex Crimes

Whether you call it date rape or, “she never said ‘No’,” alcohol plays a major role in sexual aggression. Research shows that more than 70,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 are victims of sexual assault or date rape each year. Over 50% of all sexual assault cases involve alcohol consumption by the perpetrator, victim, or both.

Technically speaking, sexual violence includes sexual assault and rape, the most common violent crimes on university campuses. Sexual assault is defined as the full range of forced sexual acts, including touching or kissing, verbally coerced intercourse, and vaginal, oral, and anal penetration. Rape is defined as a sexual assault that involves some type of penetration due to force or threat of force, and where there is lack of consent, or inability of the victim to provide consent due to age, intoxication, or mental status. Rape laws vary by state, but this definition conforms to the federal laws and most states. New laws in some states even consider it “rape” when one partner says no during intercourse after consenting to having sex.

Despite efforts to educate and encourage students to protect themselves, the frequency of sexual violence is still far too high. Surveys indicate one out of every 15 males students reported raping or attempting to rape a woman in the past academic year - and they’re just the ones that admit it. Lots of times guys don’t find anything wrong with their behavior or they use alcohol as an excuse. Many times girls erroneously think that because they were drunk when it happened, it was their fault or that there’s nothing they can do about it. In one study, victims who were under the influence at the time of the assault rated the incident as less serious than those who were not under the influence.

Most of the blame for sexual violence can’t be placed on strangers either; more than 90% of rape and sexual assault cases involve friends, schoolmates, roommates, and current/former girlfriends and boyfriends. At least 80 percent of all sexual assaults occur during some kind of social interaction, typically on a date.

Why does drinking commonly lead to sexual assault and rape? Alcohol can alter self-perceptions, leading some people to feel more aggressive and powerful. Drinking can also cause men and women to misread non-verbal cues and therefore misunderstand a person’s desires or intentions. Some perpetrators of sexual violence wrongly believe that their drunken state justifies their behavior. But alcohol won’t provide that kind of cover. Fact is, in a court of law,

a perpetrator is still responsible for his or her actions regardless of whether he or she was under the influence at the time of the crime.

To prevent sexual violence, avoid being alone with another person if you've been drinking, be aware of your surroundings and avoid empty hallways or isolated parts of bars and houses where someone could easily pull you into a bedroom or closet. And for guys out there, beware of that second brain of yours. If the person you're with expresses any unwillingness or doubt about engaging in sexual activity, get out of the situation **RIGHT AWAY!** Tonight's drunken "maybe" could easily end up tomorrow's "what did we do last night?" Since most states don't consider someone who is drunk as being capable of giving consent, you're definitely better safe than sorry.



Drinking & Aggression

From trashing dorm hallways, to wrapping cars with tape, to stealing stop signs, activities that probably sound stupid when you're sober often get more appealing when you're drunk. Alcohol reduces all kinds of inhibitions, including those that keep anger under wrap. You might say it's unfortunate, but truth is being drunk tonight doesn't make a person any less responsible for tomorrow. Doing something obnoxious, harmful, or even illegal is just like having sex while intoxicated: it can lead to a harsh reality check when you wake up and realize what you did.

Alcohol may encourage aggression or violence by changing the way the brain works. It inhibits the brain's ability to control impulses and impairs the way the brain processes information, which can cause a person to misread social cues and overreact to a perceived threat, or even force a sexual act. Abuse of alcohol and a propensity to violent behavior can also stem from personality traits, genetics, and environmental influences (peer and family alcohol use and aggressive behavior). In general, alcohol may increase the risk of aggressive behavior for certain individuals in certain situations.

Whether it's vandalism or actually getting into fights with other people, drinking and destruction tend to go together. In fact, over 80% of campus crimes are alcohol-related. A recent study revealed that more than 600,000 students were assaulted by another student who had been drinking, and 70,000 were victims of alcohol-related sexual assault or date rape. About 11 percent of college student drinkers reported they had damaged property while under the influence of alcohol. At least one half of all violent crimes involve alcohol consumption by the

perpetrator, the victim, or both. If the thought of fists flying doesn't phase you, consider this: people who engage in risky and aggressive behavior while drinking are more likely to possess a firearm and to be threatened by a gun while at school.

The consequences of alcohol-related aggressive behavior can extend beyond the students themselves. Colleges can suffer legal and financial consequences for alcohol-induced aggressive behavior, and are often sued for failing to adequately protect student populations. This can mean increases in tuition and student fees to cover the costs. In response to their liability, some schools have prohibited the presence of alcohol at campus events. The University of Colorado at Boulder banned the sale and consumption of beer at football games in the fall of 1996 and found that the rates of arrests, assaults, stadium ejections and referrals to student judiciary boards dropped dramatically.

Not everyone becomes aggressive after drinking, but certain individuals are more likely to get into trouble, vandalize, or even sexually assault someone while drinking. If you can't stay civil, or want to avoid the judiciary boards at your school, skip the sauce.



Drinking, Driving, And Riding

Drinking and driving is dumb. Despite incessant parent, media, and teacher warnings starting long before kids can legally take the wheel, the message that "Drinking and driving don't mix" has not hit home for many people, young and old. Unfortunately, lots of people learn this the hard way, by knowing someone who gets killed or seriously hurt.

Research shows that young drivers are more often involved in alcohol related crashes than any other age group. In a 2001 survey, 23 percent of young adults aged 18 to 25 years drove under the influence of alcohol in the past year. In that same year, 25 percent of the young drivers 15 to 20 years old who were killed in crashes were intoxicated. Bottom line is that car accidents continue to be the leading cause of death for young adults ages 15-20.

What is it about alcohol that doesn't mix with driving? Think about all the things that get harder to do when a person drinks like thinking, walking straight, talking, and remembering your name. Alcohol disrupts vision and perception. That can lead a person behind the wheel to weave in and out of traffic, or to not see stop signs or road lines. The delayed reaction time created by alcohol presents a real problem if you need to stop suddenly or maneuver the car around a child or animal

darting into the road.

Alcohol can also lead a person to take risks he or she wouldn't usually take because it decreases inhibitions. So you may be more likely to let your friend stand up through the sunroof or pretend you're cruising down the autobahn to see what the mobile tops out at. Even after blood alcohol content begins to decline, reaction time can still be impaired. Depending on how much a person drinks, even six hours of sleep may not be enough for alcohol effects to wear off entirely so that they can last well into "the morning after."

Aside from not letting your friends drive drunk, it's equally important not to get in a car with someone who has been drinking. Why would anyone get in a car with a driver who's under the influence? Often the rider is drunk as well and not thinking clearly. Also, people accept a ride with someone who's been drinking because they feel uncomfortable confronting the driver or suggesting another option like taking a cab. Many mistakenly assume that a friend's good judgment and driving skills when sober carry over to when he or she is intoxicated. Or, they accept a ride because they feel that giving the drunk driver responsibility for the lives of others will somehow keep him or her from driving recklessly. Not a good plan.

If safety isn't enough of a compelling reason not to drink and drive, add the good old five-oh as a deterrent. Have one for the road and chances are the cops will provide the chaser, which likely means ending up on a ten-speed. The consequences of mixing alcohol and driving range from loss of a license, to heavy fines, to increased insurance fees, to jail time. All the more reason to have a designated driver [DD] if you're going to drink.

If you're the one with the keys, don't drink. Since the best intentions can sometimes fall to the wayside after going overboard with alcohol, plan ahead on nights you'll be drinking by not taking out your car. And if you find yourself stepping up and drinking more to defend a beer pong title, be prepared to change your plans and either crash at a friend's place or snag a cab home.



Smoking & Drinking

If you're a person that says "I only smoke when I drink," you may already be hooked. Studies have found that drinking and smoking often do, quite literally, go hand-in-hand. But what might start out as social smoking can become a hard-core cigarette addiction. College students often

underestimate just how addictive tobacco is. A false sense of security that you can stop smoking whenever you feel like it can put you at substantial risk for developing a long-term tobacco addiction. Even if you don't become addicted, using tobacco always poses health risks, even if you use it once in awhile.

The relationship between alcohol and tobacco is particularly apparent at colleges. In one survey, over 50% of students had used tobacco in the previous year and one third currently used tobacco. Tobacco use was significantly higher among students who also use other substances, like alcohol and marijuana. While few people have the intention of making it a habit, the tobacco dependence that develops while just experimenting often follows students well beyond college. A large majority of addicted smokers on college campuses started as occasional, social smokers. The Marlboro man just kind of crept into their daily routine. It's difficult to quit once smoking is a regular part of your life, even if you only take a few drags from a friend each day. One recent study showed that 18% of current college smokers had made 5 or more attempts to quit in the past year.

Alcohol triggers tobacco use, and vice versa. Contexts like clubs, bars, cook-outs with friends, and game nights can become the triggers to do both. There are also certain personality characteristics, like impulsivity (tendency to make spontaneous choices regardless of risks) and sensation seeking (need for new, high stim experiences) that are associated with both alcohol and tobacco use. Certain people just have more "addictive" personalities based on genetics and environment (family and peer use). Not only does alcohol seem to send smokers looking for a drag, but after a few drinks many stop caring about any dangerous effects of tobacco.

The risk for developing cancer of the mouth, throat, and esophagus goes up significantly with repeated combined use of alcohol and tobacco. Compared with the risk for nonsmoking nondrinkers, the relative risks for developing mouth and throat cancer are 7 times greater for people who use tobacco, 6 times greater for those who drink, and 38 times greater for those who drink and smoke. And if cancer doesn't get you down, maybe not being able to get it up will give you pause. There's a definite link between smoking and impotence in men, and infertility in women.

Bottom line: banning the butts is the only way to completely ensure that smoking will not become a long-term part of your life.



Second Hand Effects

You've no doubt heard about the effects of secondhand smoke. But have you heard about second-hand *drinking* effects? No, this isn't where you absorb the alcohol you can smell on your friends into your bloodstream. This is the friend who misses the hockey game to hold a friend's hair back while he or she vomits, or the fight with a girlfriend or boyfriend because he or she said something they didn't mean while blitzed. Secondhand drinking is the negative results of one person's drinking on other people, whether it's leaving a friend to walk home alone or causing a fight.

The list below shows the percentage of students in a recent survey who experienced these common secondhand drinking effects:

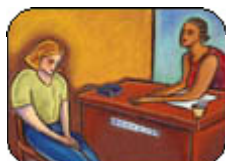
- Having studying or sleep interrupted because of others' partying: 60.0%
- Needing to "babysit" someone who drank too much: 48%
- Being insulted or humiliated: 29%
- Experiencing unwanted sexual advances: 20% percent of females
- Getting into a serious argument: 19%
- Having property damaged: 15%
- Being pushed, hit, or assaulted in some way: 10%

More than three-quarters of all students living on campus reported that they have experienced at least one secondary effect due to another student's drinking. The situation is even worse in frat or sorority houses. One study showed that on campuses with high drinking rates, 83% of non-binge drinkers who lived in Greek houses experienced secondary effects. If you drink and think your drinking doesn't affect the people around you, you're probably wrong.

Another secondhand effect is alcohol's negative impact on relationships – be they friends, lovers, or family. Alcohol gets in the way of pure ol' relating. In one study, students who binge drank [5 or more drinks in a row for males, 4 or more drinks for females] more than three times a week had personal relationships that were less intimate than those of students who drank less frequently or not at all. Bottom line: if you're getting so trashed you're not all there, you're trashing your relationships too.

Indirect victims of binge drinking include party hosts and bar/university employees who have to clean up after a night of debauchery. Just so you know where some of those college tuition hikes go: Colleges are forced to invest thousands of dollars each year to deal with the vandalism and property damage resulting from student drunkenness.

If you find yourself experiencing any of these things around friends who are drinking, you're actually a victim of secondhand drinking.



GPA - Grades Plus Alcohol

You probably already know that GPA doesn't stand for Get-Plastered-At exam time, but toward the semester's end, when academic pressure is at its max, some people try to relax and "de-stress" with a bottle. But choosing an unhealthy way to reduce stress, like partying or having a few drinks (or maybe more than a few) can backfire later on. While a night of heavy drinking may be no more time consuming than dinner and a movie, heavy drinking can impair your productivity, motivation, and ability to concentrate. The result? Study time turns into stare-at-your-book time.

You don't need a college degree to know that over time, too much alcohol can wreak havoc on your grades. Studies show that drinking reduces the number of hours spent studying per day and is associated with lower grades. A national study found that alcohol consumption was directly related to grades - those with an A average drank about one-third of what those with Ds or Fs drank. In another study, almost half of those that consumed at least five drinks three times over the previous two-week period reported falling behind in their school work, and 63% of these students reported missing class because of their drinking. You do the math: some studies have shown that in one occasion each drink is associated with 15 minutes less studying per day and approximately five drinks per occasion are associated with a GPA lower by half a grade.

Do you think they're joking when they say you can drink yourself stupid? Drinking too much not only subtracts from valuable study time and sleep, it actually damages your brain. Young adults who binge drink are at particular risk since the human brain doesn't fully mature until the age of 21. So, when you drink you can actually stunt your brain's development,

specifically the hippocampus, which is involved in learning and memory.

Overall, missed classes and poor performances on assignments are among the most common consequences of drinking on college campuses. About 25% of college students report academic consequences of their alcohol use. For many, however, alcohol related academic sacrifices go beyond a dip in a GPA. Whether it's easy access to alcohol or how hard it is to practice self-discipline when under the influence, alcohol has been identified as a factor in 28 percent of college drop-outs. In fact, about seven percent of college first year students drop out of school for alcohol-related reasons.

Achieving a balance of work and play can be a big challenge. It might be tempting to have a couple of beers or a bottle of wine when it's time for a break. In the long run, going out for a walk, taking a nap, or going to get something to eat and watching a movie will go much farther in helping you make the grade.



So You Have A Hangover

So you wake up, you feel like you've been hit by a bus, and you utter those famous words "I am never drinking again." If you're feeling like a truck ran over you the night before, your mouth is dry as a desert, and any loud noise sounds like a jackhammer, you've probably got a hangover. These symptoms are the body's way of sounding out the alarms in response to alcohol in the system. In short, hangovers develop when alcohol toxins build up faster than your body can metabolize them. Here's the scoop on hangovers.

Alcohol is a diuretic, meaning that it makes a person urinate. The vomiting that can go along with drinking too much also depletes the body of fluids. The combination can lead to severe dehydration. Alcohol also robs your brain cells of water and glucose. Dehydration is the primary cause of morning-after headaches and related aches and pains. Besides not drinking, you can minimize the damage by making sure you keep yourself fully hydrated during a night on the town. One healthier habit is to alternate beers or alcoholic drinks with glasses of water. If you're at a bar, just ask the bartender for a cup of water between each round.

One misconception is that it's helpful to drink nonalcoholic sodas such as Sprite or Coke when you're at a bar to slow down your rate of intoxication. Actually, carbonation makes the valve between your stomach and small intestine open so that alcohol in your stomach is dumped into

the small intestine, where it is absorbed much faster. So, drinking a Sprite will actually increase your rate of intoxication rather than re-hydrate your body. It's crucial to drink plenty of water before, during, and after you drink alcohol. It's also a good idea to eat something before drinking and nibble throughout the night. Food slows down the absorption of alcohol and also reduces the irritation of the stomach lining.

Alcohol beverages contain toxic substances called congeners that cause stomach irritation and vomiting. If you feel the need to vomit while drinking, just let it out. Although it feels terrible, throwing up alcohol is actually good for your body because it eliminates the excess toxins that your body can't process. However, vomiting will cause dehydration so it should be followed by lots of water.

Although it may seem like a good idea, taking acetaminophen (Tylenol) before, during, or after you drink can be harmful. Acetaminophen is metabolized by the liver, the same organ that is trying to handle the alcohol. Combining the two can cause serious liver damage. It's also not a good idea to take aspirin or ibuprofen when drinking. Aspirin can irritate your stomach lining, which is already annoyed by the alcohol. While it is dangerous to mix pain relievers and alcohol, it is fine to take them the next day when the alcohol is out of your system.

Forget the coffee, cold shower, or greasy food, the only real cure for a hangover is time and some alcohol-free sleep. Whether it's spring break in Acapulco or just a night on the town with friends, take it easy, don't drink on an empty stomach, and remember that you'll need plenty of water to go the distance.



Types Of Help

Sure, lots of kids joke about being alcoholics. Some of them are even proud of it. But most kids don't know where to go if they really do have a problem. The important thing to remember is that help is out there and college is the time when lots of people find they need it. Don't be embarrassed to go get it. Most student health centers on campus have staff and special programming to deal with substance use issues, including those associated with alcohol.

People are different in terms of what works best for them to cut down or stop drinking. Some people prefer one-on-one counseling; others like group sessions where participants share challenges associated with alcohol and learn from others' experiences. Many communities also

offer support groups like AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) or NA (Narcotics Anonymous). These support groups are anonymous and participation at each meeting is entirely voluntary.

For those who'd rather not join a group, there are a few different types of therapy that may be helpful. In Motivational Enhancement Therapy (MET), the therapist and client work closely together to explore the benefits of abstinence, review treatment options, and design a treatment plan. Brief interventions can also be effective. Many people with alcohol use issues benefit from counseling with physicians or nursing staff. Often in five visits or less, individuals can receive beneficial advice on strategies and resources to moderate use or quit drinking altogether. Check out your campus health center.

There are also many medications that are used to treat alcoholism. Some medications can help reduce cravings for alcohol, while others discourage drinking by making the person feel sick if he or she drinks. Typically, these medications are used in addition to some sort of therapy or support group.

Being confronted about drinking by a close friend or family member is a common trigger for a person to curb his/her drinking. If you think a friend has a problem with alcohol, tell him or her you're concerned. They may be angry at first but showing your concern is showing you care. A strong support network is important for anyone who is trying to make a change.

It's ok to try out a few strategies to find out which one is right for you. You may be a "let's share" type or you want a more private approach. Either way, the important thing is to pick something you can stick with. Visit the "[Links & Hotlines](#)" page under Rapid Resources (above), to find a listing of different programs that are available.

Adapted from www.mystudentbody.com, 9/02/05