

# Drug Facts: **ALCOHOL**

A Library and Resource Center on Alcohol, Tobacco, Other Drugs, Mental Health and Wellness



Alcohol is a depressant that comes from organic sources including grapes, grains and berries. These are fermented or are distilled into a liquid.

Alcohol affects every part of the body. It is carried through the bloodstream to the brain, stomach, internal organs, liver, kidneys, muscles--everywhere. It is absorbed very quickly (as short as 5-10 minutes) and can stay in the body for several hours.

Alcohol affects the central nervous system and brain. It can make users loosen up, relax, and feel more comfortable or can make them more aggressive.

Unfortunately, it also lowers their inhibitions, which can set them up for dangerous or embarrassing behavior. Alcohol is a drug and is only legal for people over the age 21.

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), 2.6 million young people do not know that a person can die of an overdose of alcohol. Alcohol poisoning occurs when a person drinks a large quantity of alcohol in a short amount of time

**A standard drink is:**

- One 12-ounce bottle of beer or wine cooler
- One 5-ounce glass of wine
- 1.5 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits



## HEALTH HAZARDS

- People who begin drinking before the age of 15 are four times more likely to develop alcohol dependence than those who wait until age 21. Each additional year of delayed drinking onset reduces the probability of alcohol dependence by 14 percent.
- Adolescents who drink heavily assume the same long-term health risks as adults who drink heavily. This means they are at increased risk of developing cirrhosis of the liver, pancreatitis, hemorrhagic stroke, and certain forms of cancer.
- Adolescents who use alcohol are more likely to become sexually active, which places them at greater risk of HIV infection and other sexually transmitted diseases.
- One study showed that students diagnosed with alcohol abuse were four times more likely to experience major depression than those without an alcohol problem.
- Alcohol use among adolescents has been associated with planning, attempting, and completing suicide.

Information provided by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.  
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