

Alcohol

Get the Facts! From the Blue Ridge Poison Center at UVA Health

Alcohol is the intoxicating chemical in beer, wine, or liquor. It can also be an ingredient in some liquid medications and some products like mouthwash and cologne.

What is the problem?

Alcohol plays a role in releasing *dopamine*, a brain chemical linked to feelings of pleasure. Alcohol is also a central nervous system depressant. One or two drinks may leave a person feeling relaxed, happy, and sociable. However, not everybody experiences pleasurable effects from alcohol. Drinking alcohol faster than the body can process it may result in *alcohol overdose*. Symptoms of alcohol overdose include confusion, slowed reaction time, poor judgment, difficulty speaking or moving, sleepiness, slowed breathing, nausea and vomiting.

If alcohol is consumed rapidly and in large amounts, it can result in unconsciousness ("passing out"), coma, and death. Alcohol is also linked to many chronic diseases including cancer, liver disease, and psychological disorders. Alcohol also increases the risk of injury from accidents or acts of violence. People can become addicted to alcohol.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there are over 380 deaths from excessive alcohol use in the U.S. each day.



How Can You Protect Yourself and Others?

- Consume no more than one drink per hour. Alternate alcohol with non-alcoholic beverages. Eat before and while you are drinking.
- Do not accept drinks from strangers or leave your drink unattended.
- Use designated drivers who stay sober.
- Check the label on your medicines to be sure it's safe to combine them with alcohol.
- Some people should avoid alcohol completely. Talk to your healthcare provider.

For more tips on lower-risk alcohol use, visit Gordie.org.



The Blue Ridge Poison Center at UVA Health

www.brpc.virginia.edu

Alcohol (continued from front)

What if someone has had too much alcohol?

- Take steps to make sure they do not become the victim of an accident or a crime.
- Do not let them drive.
- Never leave an intoxicated person alone to “sleep it off.” Check with them every 10 minutes to make sure they are breathing and can be awakened.
- If someone will not wake up, is not breathing, is pale or turning blue or grey (depending on skin tone), call 9-1-1 for medical help right away. Roll them onto their side while waiting for help to arrive.



Call for help even if you are worried that the intoxicated person may become angry, embarrassed, or that someone may get into trouble. **Calling for help could save their life.** If you are unsure about what to do, the Blue Ridge Poison Center can help: 1-800-222-1222. Calls are free and confidential, 24 hours a day.

If *you* are impaired, enlist the help of a trusted friend to help you stay safe.

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U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

What about children and alcohol?

Even a small amount of alcohol can be life-threatening for a child. Always keep an eye on alcoholic beverages when children are around. Store alcohol UP & AWAY, out of their sight and reach. Call the Blue Ridge Poison Center right away if a child drinks alcohol, even if they seem fine.

Alcohol use during pregnancy can harm the baby and lead to physical problems and problems with behavior and learning.

