



ALCOHOL FACTS

What is alcohol?

Alcohol is a drug that acts as a central nervous system depressant. The type of alcohol in alcoholic drinks is ethyl alcohol.

Is beer “weaker” than whiskey?

Not drink for drink. A 12 oz. domestic beer, a 5 oz. glass of wine, a 9 oz. wine cooler and a 1.5 oz. glass of distilled spirits (like whiskey) all have the same alcohol content—0.6 oz. of pure alcohol.

So whether a person has beer, wine or whiskey, drink for drink, the amount of alcohol is the same.

What happens to alcohol in the body?

Alcohol is not digested like food. It goes from the stomach and small intestines directly into the bloodstream. It then circulates to the brain, where it acts as a depressant; that is, it slows down the brain. This affects all the body's systems.

As soon as alcohol enters the bloodstream, the body starts to eliminate it, mainly through the liver. The body can eliminate only about one drink in one hour. The exact time varies from person to person.

What happens when a person drinks too much?

If a person drinks more than the body can efficiently handle—say, two drinks in an hour, or one drink in 10 minutes—his or her blood alcohol concentration (BAC) rises.

BAC refers to the amount of alcohol in the bloodstream. It is affected by many factors, such as body weight, whether or not a person has eaten and individual metabolism.

As BAC rises, judgment is the first function to become impaired by alcohol. Perceptions also are distorted, and muscular control is diminished.

How do you know when someone is impaired by alcohol?

There are degrees of impairment. Someone who is impaired may bump into things or have slurred speech. But people who are alcohol-impaired may not look, sound or act drunk. Their vision, judgment and coordination may be affected, but not to a degree that is obvious to others or even themselves.

How does a person “sober up”?

There’s only one thing that will do it—*time*. Coffee won’t work. Neither will a cold shower. These may wake the person up, but he or she will still be impaired.

How many drinks can a person have and still be sure of driving safely?

NONE! Even one drink can raise the BAC to a level that affects vision, coordination and judgment. No one who has been drinking should drive a car—even if he or she looks, acts and claims to feel fine.

Does getting drunk hurt?

YES! Getting drunk builds tolerance to alcohol, and tolerance is a step toward addiction. In addition, alcohol can damage body organs, especially the liver and brain. Drinking a lot very fast can even cause death. If a person’s BAC soars too high, the depressant effect can cause the body’s major systems to shut down. Breathing and heartbeat can stop and the drinker can die.

Things to Remember about Alcohol

1. Alcohol-related motor vehicle accidents are the number one cause of death for teenagers and young adults.
2. Alcohol is believed to be involved in 50% of home accidents and 70% of drowning.
3. Alcohol use during pregnancy can cause fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS). FAS causes brain damage and physical deformities. Alcohol passed to babies in breast milk also can damage infants’ brains. Women who are pregnant or nursing should not drink at all.
4. Females who drink are more likely than male drinkers to develop cirrhosis of the liver.
5. Alcohol impairs judgment and can change the way people behave. Drinkers may become aggressive or engage in sexual activity that they otherwise would avoid. Rape is often associated with alcohol use.
6. Alcohol is junk food. It is high in calories and has no nutritional value.
7. In all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Canada, the legal drinking age is 21.