

Alcohol Abuse in Teens

What is alcohol abuse?

A recurring pattern of high-risk drinking that creates problems for the drinker, for others, or for society. Excessive alcohol consumption is one of the top 3 causes of preventable death in the U.S.

Who is more likely to abuse alcohol?

Heavy or high-risk drinking is more common among ages 18-24. However, alcohol abuse is still seen as a problem in adolescents, ages 12-17 years. About 40% of 8th graders, 66% of 10th graders and 75% of 12th graders have tried alcohol.

Adolescence is marked as one of the heaviest drinking periods of a person's life. About 80% of these youths begin drinking before the end of high school and when they drink, they tend to drink in a lot.

How does alcohol affect the body?

Alcohol is absorbed directly into the blood where it can travel to all the organs in the body. Alcohol can damage every organ in the body including the liver and the brain. It can cause nausea or vomiting. A person can even accidentally choke on or inhale the vomit or other substances into their lungs.

Alcohol can also lead to death. About 5,000 youths die each year from underage drinking. 1,900 of these youths die from car accidents, 1,600 from homicides, 300 from suicides, and hundreds from other injuries such as falls, burns, and drownings. Alcohol can also stop breathing if taken in large amounts. Another cause of death would be from alcohol poisoning.

What are some signs of alcohol poisoning?

- ✓ Confusion or coma
- ✓ Vomiting
- ✓ Seizures
- ✓ Slow or irregular breathing
- ✓ Low body temperature

How does alcohol affect the brain?

Alcohol can reduce brain activity which leads to:

- ✓ Difficulty walking
- ✓ Poor judgment
- ✓ Slurred speech

- ✓ Slow reflexes
- ✓ Blurred vision
- ✓ Memory problems (blackouts)

These effects can occur after 1-2 drinks and resolve once drinking is stopped. In someone who drinks heavily over a long period of time, these effects may last even after the person has become sober and can cause changes in the brain.

Drinking too much and too quickly can cause a blackout. Blackouts are more common among social drinkers regardless of age. College students are especially at risk due to binge drinking. Binge drinking is drinking 5 or more drinks in about 2 hours for men and 4 or more drinks for women.

How alcohol affects the liver?

The liver helps break down harmful toxins like alcohol and clears them from the body. By drinking too much, it overwhelms the liver and it has trouble breaking down the alcohol. Heavy, long term drinking can damage the liver. As few as 3 drinks at one time can have toxic effects on the liver when combined with certain over-the-counter medications, such as Tylenol (acetaminophen).

What are some warning signs of alcohol abuse?

- ✓ Drinking because you feel angry or sad
- ✓ Drinking has made you late for work or school
- ✓ Drinking worries your family
- ✓ Drinking after telling yourself that you won't drink
- ✓ Forgetting things when you have been drinking
- ✓ Getting headaches or hangovers after drinking

What should you do if you think someone has alcohol poisoning?

Alcohol poisoning can be very serious and can result in harm to the person such as:

- ✓ Choking on his or her own vomit
- ✓ Breathing can slow or even stop
- ✓ Heart beats can become irregular or stop
- ✓ Body temperature could become low
- ✓ Blood sugars could become low which could lead to a seizure
- ✓ Dehydration from vomiting which could lead to seizures, brain damage, or death

When you think someone might have alcohol poisoning or if they are showing some of the signs mentioned, you should call 911 for help. You don't want to try and guess how drunk a person is and you don't want to just let them sleep off the effects as it can cause more problems.

What are some ways in which teens are abusing alcohol?

- ✓ Vodka eyeballing
 - Pouring alcohol directly into eye
 - Can possibly cause eye damage
- ✓ Alcoholic gummy bears
 - Soaking gummy bears and other candies in alcohol
 - By hiding the taste of alcohol in candies it is easier to consume more alcohol from the candies than the teen thinks
- ✓ Alcohol infused whipped cream
 - Whipped cream that contains alcohol is now being sold on the shelves of some stores in certain states
 - Products: CREAM, Whipped Lightning
 - By hiding the taste of alcohol in whipped cream it is easier to consume more alcohol than the teen thinks
- ✓ Distilling hand sanitizer
 - Using table salt to separate the alcohol out of hand sanitizer
 - The foaming hand sanitizers are harder to remove the alcohol from than the gels

How much of one type of alcohol is equal to another?

It should be noted that not all alcohols contain the same amounts of alcohol. One 12 oz. beer is equal to a 5oz. glass of wine which is equal to 8-10 oz. of a wine cooler which is equal to 1.5 oz. shot of liquor (40-50% alcohol).

What are some other sources of alcohol?

Liquor, beer and wine are not the only sources of alcohol that youths can get into. Some household products contain alcohol. These products include:

- ✓ Mouthwash
- ✓ After Shave
- ✓ Perfumes
- ✓ Hand sanitizers, soaps and lotions
- ✓ Facial cleansers, toners and moisturizers
- ✓ Rubbing alcohol
- ✓ Cleaning products
- ✓ Paint

How to prevent your teen from abusing alcohol?

It is important to prevent teen alcohol abuse. Brain development continues into puberty and into young adult ages. By abusing alcohol, brain development can be impaired.

Prevention tips:

- ✓ Explain the problems associated with drinking
- ✓ Discuss what the family expects and the rules about alcohol use. Explain the consequences of drinking if the rules are broken

- ✓ Express how you feel about underage drinking
- ✓ Discuss any religious or cultural traditions in which alcohol use may be okay
- ✓ Tell the teen not to drink and drive or get a ride from someone who has been drinking.
Tell them to call for a ride or stay the night
- ✓ Talk about ways to handle peer pressure in regards to drinking
- ✓ Encourage outside activities or interests
- ✓ Listen to the teen about their views and opinions about alcohol use
- ✓ Do not serve alcohol to teens
- ✓ Lock away your alcohol
- ✓ Be a role model

Also remember to look for signs of alcohol poisoning and call 911 if you think someone has alcohol poisoning.

References

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