

Rethink Holiday Drinking

Turn to page 2 to learn about the impacts of alcohol on your driving and identify ways to be safe if you plan to drink over the holidays.

Ways to Cut Down or Quit Drinking

Consider these tips if you want to cut down or quit drinking.

Welcome!

This quarter's theme is *Alcohol Education*. We welcome your feedback at ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com.

DidUknow?

Alcohol's Impact Is Widespread

Alcohol Use Among Employed

- ◆ Most binge and heavy alcohol users are employed. Among 54.0 million adult **binge drinkers**, **79.4% were employed either full or part time**. Among 16.3 million adult **heavy drinkers**, **79.2% were employed**.
- ◆ **Binge Drinking:** 5+ drinks on same occasion on at least 1 day in past month
- ◆ **Heavy Drinking:** 5+ drinks on same occasion on each of 5 or more days in past month

Association Between Alcohol and Illicit Drug Use

- ◆ The level of alcohol use is associated with illicit drug use. Among the 16.3 million heavy drinkers aged 12 or older, **32.6% were current illicit drug users**. Persons who were not current alcohol users were less likely to have used illicit drugs in the past month.

Driving Under the Influence

- ◆ In 2006, an estimated 12.4% of people aged 12 or older drove under the influence of alcohol at least once in the past year.
- ◆ **Alcohol is involved in approximately 40% of traffic deaths**. Among persons aged 16 to 20, it's 36%.

Source:

<http://www.oas.samhsa.gov/2k6/2k6resultr.htm#Ch3> Sept 27, 2010.

<http://www.nih.gov/about/researchresultsforthepublic/AlcoholRelatedTrafficDeaths.pdf> Sept 27, 2010.

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ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com

1.800.647.3327
www.lifesolutionsforyou.com

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Beyond Hangovers: Understanding Alcohol's Impact on Your Health

Alcohol is part of our culture — it helps us celebrate and socialize, and it enhances our religious ceremonies. But drinking too much — on a single occasion or over time — can have serious consequences for our health. Alcohol abuse can damage organs, weaken the immune system, and contribute to cancers. Genes, environment, and even diet can play a role in whether you develop an alcohol-related disease. To stay healthy and to decide what role alcohol should play in your life, you need accurate, up-to-date information. The following information provides a starting point in becoming more informed and a basis to discuss current alcohol use with your physician.

Alcohol Shrinks and Disturbs Brain Tissue

Heavy alcohol consumption — even on a single occasion — can throw the delicate balance of neurotransmitters off course. Neurotransmitters are chemicals in the brain that deliver messages to the nerve cells, and they are ultimately responsible for brain function. Alcohol's effect on neurotransmitters results in slowed information relaying, extreme feelings of drowsiness, and mood and behavioral changes (including depression, agitation, memory loss, and even seizures). Long-term, heavy drinking causes alterations in the size of brain cells and potential shrinkage in the overall size of the brain. These changes may affect your motor coordination, temperature regulation, sleep, and various cognitive functions, including learning and memory. The brain eventually tries to compensate for these disruptions, by building up a tolerance to alcohol, developing alcohol dependence, and experiencing withdrawal symptoms.

Effects on the Heart

Long-term, heavy drinking weakens the heart muscle. A weakened heart droops and stretches, resulting in the inability to contract effectively and to be able to pump enough blood to sufficiently nourish the organs. Alcohol can also cause the heart to beat too rapidly or irregularly or to elevate blood pressure, which leads to hypertension. In some cases, the blood flow shortage causes severe damage to organs and tissues, which can lead to heart failure or stroke. Recent studies show that people who binge drink are about 56% more likely than people who never binge drink to suffer a stroke over 10 years.

Effects on Other Organs

Alcohol abuse has severe consequences for your body. Some long-term, heavy drinkers will experience severe abdominal pain, diabetes, pancreatic cancer, and death. Liver disease is one of the leading causes of illness and death in the United States, with more than 2 million Americans suffering from liver disease caused by alcohol. In general, liver disease strikes people who drink heavily over many years. The liver breaks down most of the alcohol a person consumes, but the process of breaking alcohol down generates toxins even more harmful than alcohol itself. These by-products damage liver cells, promote inflammation, and weaken the body's natural defenses — leading to liver disease and a lowered immune system. In addition, drinking too much alcohol is one lifestyle habit that can increase your risk of developing certain cancers. This does not mean that anyone who drinks too much will develop cancer. However, numerous studies show the more you drink, the more you increase your chances of developing certain types of cancer.

Source: <http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/Hangovers/beyondHangovers.htm> October 26, 2010.

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More people are likely to die in alcohol-related traffic crashes on New Year's Eve than on other winter evenings. A recent analysis of National Highway Traffic Safety Administration statistics shows that, by the time our country finished ringing in the year 2008 (the latest year for which data are available), 59 people had died in alcohol-related traffic crashes in the 12-hour span between 6 p.m. on New Year's Eve and 5:59 a.m. the next morning. Two weeks later, on the same night of the week, the death toll dropped to 13.

Alcohol's Effects Begin Quickly

- ◆ **Critical driving-related skills and decision-making abilities are diminished long before you begin to show the obvious physical signs of intoxication.** Initially, alcohol acts as a stimulant and you may temporarily feel upbeat and excited. But don't be fooled. Inhibition and judgment are soon affected, increasing the chances of making reckless decisions behind the wheel. As more alcohol is consumed, fine motor skills and reaction time begin to suffer, and behavior becomes poorly controlled and sometimes aggressive, which compromises driving abilities even further. Continued drinking can lead to slurred speech and the loss of coordination and balance that we typically associate with being "drunk."
- ◆ **During a night of drinking, it's easy to misjudge alcohol's lasting effects.** Many people believe that they can drive safely once they have stopped drinking for the night and have had a strong cup of coffee. The truth is that alcohol continues to affect the brain and body long after your last drink. Even after someone stops drinking, alcohol in the stomach and intestines continues to enter the bloodstream and circulate through the body. As a result, judgment and coordination can be impaired for hours after drinking.
- ◆ **Driving home late at night is especially hazardous because natural nighttime drowsiness is magnified by the depressant effect of alcohol.** At higher levels alcohol acts as a depressant, which causes people to become sleepy and sometimes pass out. Driving abilities may even be impaired the next day, when any alcohol remaining in the system, or the general headache and disorientation associated with hangovers, contributes to the feelings of sluggishness (even though the person no longer feels "drunk").

Before You Celebrate — Plan Ahead

No one intends to harm anyone when they get behind the wheel on New Year's Eve. Yet traffic fatalities persist and myths about drinking live on despite the facts — there's no way to speed up the brain's recovery from alcohol and no way to make good decisions when you are drinking too much, too fast. On an evening like New Year's Eve (or any other evening, for that matter), rapid consumption of large amounts of alcohol is dangerous.

So this New Year's Eve, do not underestimate the effects of alcohol. Don't believe you can beat them. Pace yourself. Be aware of how much you've consumed throughout the night. Think about the consequences of an arrest or a potentially fatal traffic crash and *make alternative plans to get home safely.* If you plan to drink, assign a designated driver or plan to take a cab or the bus. Be proactive. Don't wait until you are already impaired to make important decisions.

Source: <http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/Publications/RethinkingHolidayDrinking>, October 26, 2010.

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Ways to Cut Down or Quit Drinking

Small changes can make a big difference in reducing your chances of having alcohol-related problems. Whatever strategies you choose, give them a fair trial. Try different approaches to find what works for you. If you haven't made progress in cutting down after 2 months, consider and seeking professional help and quitting drinking altogether.

Strategies to Help You Cut Down Your Drinking

- ◆ **Keep track of how much you drink.** Make a note of each drink before you drink it, either on a notepad or on your mobile phone, to help you slow down.
- ◆ **Count and measure.** Know the standard drink sizes so you can count your drinks accurately (do an Internet search for "standard alcoholic drink"). Practice at home; measure and pour water in a glass to equal the amount of a standard drink, so you get used to the volume.
- ◆ **Set goals.** Decide how many days a week you want to drink and how many drinks you'll have on those days.
- ◆ **Pace and space.** When you do drink, pace yourself. Sip slowly. Have no more than one standard size drink per hour. Have "drink spacers" — make every other drink a non-alcoholic one, such as water, soda, or juice.
- ◆ **Include food.** Don't drink on an empty stomach. Eating food will help prevent the alcohol from being absorbed too quickly into your system.
- ◆ **Find alternatives.** If drinking has occupied a lot of your time, then fill free time by developing healthy activities or hobbies. If alcohol has been a method for you to cope with social anxiety, identify your own strategies or work with a LifeSolutions counselor to help you find healthy ways to cope.
- ◆ **Avoid "triggers."** What triggers your urge to drink? If certain people, places, or things make you drink, then try to avoid them. Establish clearer boundaries and plan something else to do when certain moods, activities, or times of the day create the urge to drink.
- ◆ **Plan to handle urges.** Keep reminders for your reasons to change; talk with someone you trust; or engage in an activity to distract yourself from the urge.
- ◆ **Know your "no."** You're likely to be offered a drink at times when you don't want one, so have a polite, convincing "no, thank you" ready.

Note: If you have been drinking heavily for some time, it is best to seek professional help to avoid potentially harmful withdrawal symptoms from suddenly stopping alcohol use.

For any assistance in quitting or cutting down on your drinking, or to locate resources for you or a loved one, please contact LifeSolutions at 1-800-647-3327.

Source: <http://www.rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/Strategies/TipsToTry.asp> October 26, 2010.

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