

ALCOHOL AND DRINKING

Ruth Engs, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN
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What is alcohol? How does it effect a person? Why does it cause problems for some people? What are the resources in the community where a person can find help for alcohol problems? How can you resist pressure to drink?

These are some of the questions teen-agers often ask about alcohol. Alcohol is widely available in most communities. Because it is one of the most commonly used and abused drugs, it is important for you to learn the facts about alcohol. The decisions you make about alcohol use can have an effect upon your health now and in the years ahead. Knowing the facts about alcohol can aid you in making wise decisions which in turn can help you to achieve optimum wellness.

Kinds of Alcohol

There are many different kinds of alcohol. Many of them are used only in industrial processes and are very poisonous.

Methyl

alcohol is made from wood materials. It is used in industry and at home to refinish furniture. Methyl alcohol is highly toxic. Toxic means that it is very harmful to health. If methyl alcohol is accidentally drunk it can cause blindness and death. If the fumes are breathed in, it can make a person very sick.

Another very poisonous type of alcohol is isopropyl alcohol. It is used in industrial processes and for medical reasons. Medical personnel often use it as a skin disinfectant before an injection or surgery. In the hospital or at home, it is sometimes rubbed on the skin to reduce fevers and to disinfect thermometers.

The kind of alcohol found in alcoholic drinks is called Ethanol or ethyl alcohol. This type of alcohol is made by fermentation. Fermentation is the process in which yeast acts upon starches in crushed grains or upon sugars in crushed fruit to produce ethyl alcohol. Alcoholic drinks come in the form of beer, wines and liquor.

There are different amounts of ethyl alcohol in these different forms of alcoholic beverages. Liquor, when not mixed with other liquids, contains much more alcohol than wine or beer. Wine contains more alcohol than beer.

Liquors usually contain about 40% alcohol. Wines contain about 10 to 12 % alcohol and beers about 2 to 6% alcohol. However, in the United States when alcohol is served, a standard glass of beer, wine glass of wine and shot glass of liquor each contain about the same amount of ethanol. About an ounce of alcohol is found in these standard sized drinks.

The amount of ethanol found in liquor is called Proof. The proof of liquor is twice the percent of alcohol in the bottle. For example, an 80 proof bottle of liquor would have 40% ethanol by volume.

Why people do or do not use alcohol

Beverage alcohol is used in different ways that promote its responsible use. It is used as a medicine. Small amounts of ethanol are found in some over-the-counter and prescription medicines. When these medicines are used as directed by a doctor, they can help make a person well. To help increase appetite before a meal, some doctors prescribe an alcoholic drink to elderly people.

Beverage alcohol is used for religious and social reasons. For some people, small amounts of alcohol are drunk at various cultural or religious celebrations.

Some adults drink moderate amounts of alcohol at parties or other social occasions. Others may drink wine with their meals.

However, some people do not drink alcoholic beverages at all for a variety of reasons. Many people do not drink alcohol as it is against their religious beliefs. Some people do not drink because they do not like the taste or effect. Other people do not drink because they are taking medications. If they drink the alcohol can prevent the medicine from working. Some people do not drink because they are recovering from alcoholism and drinking could cause them to have further problems. Other people do not drink because they are sick and drinking could make their illness worse. In the United States about 30% of the adult population does not drink.

Reasons for irresponsible alcohol use

Some people drink because they feel pressured to do so, either by advertising or by their friends. Others use alcohol to meet some of their personal needs. Some people drink in an irresponsible way because of family background. Others drink irresponsibly because they do not know that alcohol can cause them harm.

Advertising

Advertisements for alcoholic beverages often suggest that people who drink alcohol feel secure, are adult or sophisticated. In these advertisements, well-dressed people are shown having fun or relaxing after work. The advertisements give the impression that alcohol is a necessary part of these daily activities.

Teenagers are influenced by these advertisements to begin drinking. Teens who believe that drinking will make them adult or sophisticated often feel

insecure. Drinking does not make a person an adult or feel secure. Making positive and responsible choices can help make a person feel secure and can help make a person an adult.

Peer influence

Some teenagers drink not because they want to, but because of pressure from their friends. They often believe that they cannot be part of the group unless they drink. This pressure to drink is called peer influence. Peer influence can cause people to do other behaviors they really do not want to do, besides drinking.

Some other behaviors, which teens sometimes feel pressured into doing to be accepted by their friends, include wearing a particular hair style or clothing, smoking, or taking drugs. However, drinking, or doing things a person feels pressured into doing, cannot satisfy the need for belonging. People who give into this group pressure may lack self-esteem. If they can learn to feel better about themselves, they can more easily follow their own judgement and resist pressure from their friends. Completing a task, doing well in arts, crafts, sports or hobbies can help to increase self esteem.

Personal needs

Some people drink to escape from problems such as loneliness or boredom. Others drink to relieve tension and stress, or because they are angry or frustrated. Rather than facing the causes of their uncomfortable feelings, they drink to forget them. The difficulty with this approach is that the problems still remain when the effects of the alcohol wear off.

Instead of resolving their problems, the person may drink even more to avoid them. This can lead to a dependence upon alcohol.

Teenagers often feel shy and nervous when they are with a group of people or are meeting someone for the first time. To cover up their shyness and to feel more comfortable, many teenagers begin drinking. They believe that drinking gives them confidence, although it really causes them to lose judgment and control. Becoming involved with communication skill groups can help the teenager become less shy and nervous when they are with other people.

Family background

Some individuals are brought up in homes where family members drink in an irresponsible way. The person may not realize that the family member is drinking irresponsibly. They may not realize that alcohol can have negative effects. When these people become adults, they sometimes drink the way they have seen their family members drink. When this happens they may find that alcohol causes them harm. Learning the facts about how alcohol effects the body can help in making responsible choices concerning drinking.

READING CRITICALLY

1. Describe at least three types of alcohols. What they are used for ?
2. What are the three types of alcoholic drinks ? How much alcohol is found in each of them ? What is proof ?
3. List at least three reasons why some adults do not drink ?

THINKING CRITICALLY

1. How can advertisement influence drinking?
2. Give some examples of peer influence found in your life. How might friends influence drinking ?

PHYSICAL EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL USE AND ABUSE

Alcohol's first effects are to increase the heartbeat and to raise blood pressure. For this reason, many people believe that alcohol is a stimulant. However, alcohol is really a depressant. People often feel more lively after drinking because alcohol dulls the part of the brain that controls behavior and judgement.

As the level of alcohol in the blood increases, the effect on the nervous system becomes more obvious. The areas of the brain that control reason, comprehension, and decision-making no longer work well. These effects of alcohol on the person are influenced by a number of factors.

Process of alcohol's effect on the body

Like food, alcohol contains calories. However, alcohol has little or no nutritional value. When taken into the body, alcohol does not go through the normal digestive process. Instead it is almost immediately absorbed into the circulatory system through the walls of the stomach and small intestine. If there is food in the stomach the absorption of alcohol into the circulatory system will be slowed down. If there is no food in the stomach the alcohol in the drink is absorbed into the blood stream faster. The time it takes for the alcohol to get into the blood stream is called the rate of absorption.

The rate of absorption of alcohol into the blood stream is different for different people. The rate may be different for the same person at different times. Various factors including illness, fatigue, and emotional states

can affect the rate of absorption of alcohol. The faster the rate of absorption, the more quickly the person will feel the effects of alcohol. A drink which contains a lot of alcohol will effect a person more, compared to a drink without much alcohol in it. If a person drinks slowly, such as sipping one drink over an hour`s time, only a slight effect upon the person will occur compared to a person who quickly consumes a drink in a few minutes. A small or thin person is more greatly effected by the same amount of alcohol, compared to a large or fat person. This is because a large person has a greater volume of blood in which the alcohol becomes diluted compared to a small person.

The amount of alcohol found in the blood stream is called the Blood Alcohol Concentration(BAC) or sometimes the Blood Alcohol Level. This level refers to the percentage of alcohol in a person's blood. The higher the concentration of alcohol in the blood, the more effect the alcohol will have on the person.

For an example, if a 150 pound person has one drink, the BAC will be about 0.02%. At this level the person might have a slight change in feelings and feel mildly relaxed. A person who weighs under a 150 pounds will have a higher BAC than 0.02%. A person who weighs over 150 pounds would have a lower BAC than 0.02%. This means that a smaller person would have more effect from the same number of drinks compared to a larger person. Two drinks in an hour would bring the BAC to about 0.04 for the 150 pound person. At this level some loss of judgement, physical coordination and control of behavior may result.

As little as four and a half drinks in an hour for the 150 pound person would bring the BAC up to 0.10. At this level a major loss of mental abilities and physical coordination occurs. The person has a slower reaction time. This means he or she cannot do things as fast compared to when he or she has not been drinking. The person has a lack of coordination and cannot control body movements or balance. This effect can cause serious problems. For example, a person driving a car might find

it difficult to avoid running off the road or find that he or she could not step on the breaks fast enough to avoid an accident. Because of the effect of alcohol on the body, it is illegal to drive with a BAC above 0.10%. The higher the BAC the more likely the person will experience problems.

Intoxication

As the level of alcohol in the blood increases, the effect on the nervous system becomes more obvious and the person experiences more problems. When people begin to have problems from drinking alcohol and lose control over some of their mental or physical abilities, they are called drunk or intoxicated. When people are intoxicated they are considered to be abusing alcohol. A person who is abusing alcohol may be unable to talk, think, or see clearly. He or she may lose the ability to stand and move without staggering or falling. An intoxicated person may even lose consciousness. In an unconscious state he or she is likely to throw up and breath in the vomit. This can cause death.

People can also die from alcohol poisoning when they have drunk too much alcohol. Someone who drinks too much alcohol will feel the effects of the alcohol for hours after the last drink. The alcohol in the body is slowly broken down by the liver. The cells in the liver break the alcohol down at the rate of about 1/2 to 1 ounce(15 to 30 ml) per hour. Some alcohol is also eliminated by the body through the breath, skin, urine and feces. Nothing can speed up this process.

Intoxication can produce an unpleasant side effect known as a hangover. Symptoms of hangovers include headache, stomach ache, vomiting, and thirst. These symptoms may appear after all of the alcohol in the body has been eliminated. The only cure for a hangover is rest and plenty of water.

After being intoxicated some people experience blackouts. A blackout is a period of time in which the

person does not remember what has happened. A blackout is a serious sign that the person is abusing alcohol. Blackouts do occur among young people who are abusing alcohol. However, they are more likely to occur among people who have been abusing alcohol for many years.

LONG TERM PHYSICAL EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL ON THE BODY

When people abuse alcohol for many years various physical problems occur. The alcohol can cause physical damage to the liver, brain and heart. The person can become a problem drinker or alcoholic.

Signs of Alcoholism

The long term effect of abusing alcohol is called alcoholism or problem drinking. This condition can affect people of all ages, including teenagers. There is much debate as to what causes alcoholism. Some researchers feel it is caused by heredity while others feel it is caused by the home environment. Still others feel it is caused by a mixture of heredity and environmental factors.

Alcoholism is a condition that develops slowly among adults. It can occur in less than two years among teenagers. As the person develops a tolerance for alcohol, he or she requires more and more alcohol to feel its effects. This increased tolerance is an early sign that a problem may be developing.

When people develop a tolerance for alcohol, they often become physically and psychologically dependent upon it. Physical dependence is the need to take regular amounts of alcohol in order for the body to function normally. This is because the alcohol has changed the way the body works. Psychological dependence is the need to use alcohol to maintain a feeling of well-being.

People who have become physically dependent upon alcohol and are not able to get it, will go through withdrawal symptoms. The withdrawal symptoms from alcohol include insomnia, nervousness, rapid pulse rate, high blood

pressure and sometimes hallucinations, convulsions and death.

People who become dependent upon alcohol often find they are unable to control or limit the amount of alcohol they drink. This is called loss of control. In loss of control, a person may decide only to have two drinks. However, he or she consumes six drinks even when he or she only wanted to have two.

Health problems resulting from problem drinking

There are many physical health problems resulting from problem drinking. Heavy long term drinking can cause liver and digestive tract disease. A liver severely damaged by alcohol is so scared that it is unable to work properly. The heavy repeated use of alcohol over many years can also damage the lining of the stomach and mouth. This may cause a person to get stomach or mouth cancer.

Problem drinking can cause permanent brain damage. A condition called Korsakoff's Psychosis affects memory and causes jerky movements of the head and trembling hands.

For the person who drinks over two drinks a day and smokes there is an increase in heart disease.

Breast cancer is a risk among women who drink heavily. Women who drink heavily during pregnancy have a greater chance of giving birth to deformed and mentally handicapped babies. This is because the alcohol damages the developing the baby in the womb. This condition is called the Fetal Alcohol Syndrome.

Alcoholics sometimes drink so much that they have no desire for nutritious foods. Because the calories in alcohol do not contain the nutrients necessary for good health, some problem drinkers suffer from malnutrition and vitamin B deficiency. This can cause the person to feel weak and to have trembling hands. The alcohol may cause irritation to the digestive system which may also cause poor absorption of food into the body. These physical health problems from long time alcohol abuse can lead to an early death for problem drinkers.

READING CRITICALLY

1. List five effects of ethyl alcohol on the body.
2. Why can the rate of absorption have an affect upon the effect of alcohol ?
3. Describe at least four serious physical health problems resulting from long time alcohol abuse.

THINKING CRITICALLY

1. If a person has become unconscious from drinking too much, what first aid measures should be taken?
2. If a person has a family member with a drinking problem, why might it be a good idea for him or her never to drink ?

SOCIAL PROBLEMS RELATED TO PROBLEM DRINKING

Family and work problems Problem drinkers often experience problems in their relationships at home, with friends and at work. The difficulties of dealing with an alcoholic can cause families to be broken up and friendships to be lost. Problem drinkers can have work or school problems. They frequently cannot work productively.

They may sometimes be unable to show up for work and are often late to work or school. As a result of their poor work habits, they lose their jobs. Students who become alcoholics frequently drop out of school.

Alcoholics often have legal or financial problems. They may be arrested for drunk driving or crime. They are frequently involved in automobile and other accidents. The person with alcoholism can cause problems for many people including his or her children.

Children in alcoholic families are sometimes physically or emotionally abused. Physical abuse is where a child is hit or beaten. Emotional abuse is where a child is told he or she is stupid, lazy, or no good. A child who is abused can develop low self-esteem, poor school grades and

other emotional problems.

Laws and accidents

Because one in ten people have problems with alcohol, there are laws to control the sale and drinking of alcohol. Different states have laws regulating the time during the day that a person can buy beverage alcohol or drink in a tavern. In some states it is illegal to buy alcohol on Sundays. In our country it is illegal to drink under 21 years of age.

One of the biggest social problem in America is drinking and driving. In over 60% of fatal automobile accidents, the driver had been drinking. The most common cause of death today among teens is from motor vehicle accidents. Many teens who are involved with motor vehicle accidents have been drinking or have been riding with a driver who had been drinking. In many other crimes including robbery, assault, and murder, the criminal had been drinking.

Economic problems

Problem drinkers cause millions of dollars to be lost every year in the United States. Money is lost because they become sick and cannot work. When they do work they are not productive. Property damage from crimes, accidents, divorce and unemployment add to the financial loss. Billions of dollars are also spend each year for illness, hospitalization, and police investigations due to problem drinking.

If alcoholics are told about their problems caused by alcohol, they often deny they have a drinking problem. Even though they deny the problem, they need to get help.

Treatment and prevention

Most communities have clinics, counseling services, and other organizations to help alcoholics and their families. These services are often staffed by people who

have had drinking problems in the past. When people are treated for alcoholism, their family members are also treated. There are special treatment centers and services for teenagers with alcohol problems.

Some schools have a student assistance program. This is a program which requires the student, and his or her family, to go to treatment instead of being expelled from school for drinking.

One of the most popular organization in the community which helps alcoholics is Alcoholics Anonymous or AA. This is an organization with chapters in most communities. AA holds regular meetings that are open to anyone with a present or past drinking problem. During these meetings, people help one another by talking about why they abused alcohol and how AA now helps them.

Al-Anon is an organization that helps families and friends of alcoholics. It hold meetings to help these people learn to deal with problems that occur in relationships with alcoholics. Alateen, helps the teenage children of alcoholics. In alateen meetings, young people help one another deal with a parent's drinking problem.

Another organization, called Children of Alcoholics is a group in which people who have grown up in alcoholic homes can get support. These groups are often for adults who are not living at home anymore. However, in some communities there are groups for children and teens still living at home with a problem drinker.

No one is sure how to prevent alcoholism. If a person does not drink he or she cannot become an alcoholic. It is thought by some experts that if a person from an alcoholic family goes to family treatment as a teenager or young adult, he or she might be less likely to be a problem drinker.

READING CRITICALLY

1. List six negative effects upon a person and his or her family from problem drinking.
2. What is the primary cause of teenage deaths in our country?

THINKING CRITICALLY

1. How can teenage accidents be prevented? What can you do to help prevent drinking and driving deaths?
2. What kind of treatment is available in your community for children who have a family member with drinking problems ?

MAKING DECISIONS

Learning how to make decisions.

Every day we all need to make decisions. Sometimes making the wrong decision can hurt us. Making the right decision usually helps us. There are steps that people can follow to help them make healthy decisions. The first step is to realize that there is a problem and that a decision needs to be made. For example, it is dangerous to ride in a car with anyone who has been drinking. David's uncle has come to school to pick him up as his regular ride had become sick. When David's uncle comes to give him a ride home, David can smell alcohol on his uncle's breath. Since David knows it is dangerous to ride with anyone who has been drinking, he decides that he has a problem to which he must make a decision.

The second step in decision making is to decide what choices can be made to solve the problem. Along with each choice, the positive or negative results of a particular action need to be considered. David knows if he chooses to ride with his uncle, he could be in a dangerous situation. If he refuses to go with his uncle he may not have a way home. If he can not find a way home, his mother, who is at work, will probably be very angry. however, he remembers his teacher said that if teens found themselves in a situation where they needed a ride home, they could call a phone number run by a local group concerned with drinking and driving.

The next step in making a decision is taking action. David tells his uncle that he has decided not to drive home with him because he has been drinking. The uncle gets angry and yells at David and then drives off.

David goes back into the school and tells the secretary what has happened. The secretary lets David use the phone and he calls the volunteer parent. In about 15 minutes the volunteer driver takes David home.

Evaluating the decision after making the choice is the final step in making decisions. When David's mother comes home from work, he explains what has happened. His mother was happy that he did not ride with her brother as she did not know he had been drinking. David feels that he made the correct decision and he and his mother discuss other steps David could take in similar situations to this. If you were in this situation what other healthy choices could have been made?

How to Say No

You might find yourself in a situation where you do not want to do something because you know it is unhealthy, but your friends are trying to force you to do it. There are several ways you can handle this.

1. If someone wants you to do something that you do not want to do, you can say, "no," or "no, thank you".
2. If someone wants you to drink alcohol, you can offer him or her some of what you are drinking. For example, you could say, "no, thanks, but how would you like a diet soda?"
3. If you find you keep saying, no, and you keep getting pressured, you can give a sarcastic answer. For example, if people say to you, "how come you don't want to drink, are you a mama's boy ? You can answer back, "No, I'm my own boy". If they say, "You must be a wimp or nerd", answer them back, " I'm a Macho and make my own decisions".
4. Another technique which can be used when someone is

attempting to get you to do something you do not want to do is to be "a broken record". You just continue to say over and over the same thing. For example, you can say, "no, I don't want a drink, no, I don't want a drink, no, I don't want a drink."

5. You might find you are invited to a party with the "in" group. However, you think this group drinks and you do not want to go to a party where people are using alcohol. Tell the person, who is inviting you, that you do not drink and do not wish to attend a party where there will be drinking. If the person tells you that "everybody" drinks in this group you can then decline to go. Instead of feeling sorry that you are not in the "in group", get your friends, and others who share your values, together for a party or other activities.

Community organizations for interesting activities

Many communities and schools have organizations for teens to become involved with. Many schools now have a chapter of SAAD(Students against Drunk driving) or similar local groups which are concerned about teen age drinking. In the SADD, and other local groups, individuals have made the choice not to drink. As part of these groups, parents and teens develop a contract which is signed by the teen and the parent. In this contract the pupil agrees not to drink. The parent agrees to drive his or her child home from any party if the driver has been drinking. These community groups usually have parties and other activities. If your school does not have this type of group, you might want to help start one with the help of some teachers and parents.

There are community groups which have interesting activities for teens. In some communities Explorer Scouts or local interest groups sponsor exciting activities for teens. In these groups teens can learn how to rock climb, hang glide, sail or go caving. These groups sponsor such activities as wilderness

backpacking, camping, and skate board races. Community volunteer groups will let teens help with red cross work, visit with lonely hospital or nursing home patients or do other useful community projects. These types of activities can make teens feel good about themselves.

READING CRITICALLY

1. List the steps for solving a problem or making a decision.
2. What community groups are concerned about teenage drinking?

THINKING CRITICALLY

1. If you are supposed to drive with someone who has been drinking, that steps can you take to avoid riding with them ?
2. How can you help establish a group which can do various activities in your community ? Why might these groups prevent alcohol problems among teens ?

Box for Side of Page How to feel less shy with people

There are ways of decreasing shyness when in a group and when meeting other people for the first time. If you do not know what to talk about, get the other people to talk about themselves. In doing this ask them to tell you about their hobbies or activities. Ask questions in such a manner that they cannot answer by saying, yes or no. As an example, you might ask them about their favorite hobby. When they tell you, ask them to explain how, when, why and how often they do it.

Box for steps in problem solving/decision making skill

1. realize there is a problem and that a decision has to be made
 2. Determine various choices for solving the problem
 3. Think of the positive and negative consequences of each choice
 4. Make the choice and take Action
 5. Evaluate the solution
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Writing about what you learned

You have been asked to give a speech on how alcohol affects the body to a sixth grade activity class. Write out a two page speech. Include the types of alcohols, the forms of alcoholic beverages, how alcohol affects a person and the damage alcohol can cause to various parts of the body.

Pass it on

Projects to do

1. Collect advertisements for alcoholic beverages. What are the people in each advertisement doing besides drinking? How do they seem to feel? Do these activities and feelings really have much to do with alcohol? Write a short paragraph that answers these questions for each advertisement. Then paste the advertisement next to the paragraph.
2. Make a poster on the dangers of alcohol abuse. On the poster draw, write or cut out pictures that show the effects of alcohol on the body.

Information to find.

1. Telephone your local alcohol treatment clinic. Ask what program it has for problem drinkers, families and children of alcoholics. Find out what other groups offer help to alcoholics and their families. Prepare a written or oral report describing the programs that are available.
2. Call up your local AA group. Ask if it would be possible to interview a teenage recovering alcoholic. Ask this person why he or she began drinking, how he or she knew he or she had an alcohol problem, and what type of treatment he or she had. Invite the person to your class to speak.
3. Write to the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol Information, P.O. Box 2345, Rockville, MD. 20852. Ask them to send you free information concerning teenage drinking and teenage children from alcoholic families. [7th grade Dec '87]