

Alcohol

What is Alcohol?

Alcoholic drinks contain the drug ethyl alcohol. Alcohol is tasteless and has no colour. Additives give alcoholic beverages their colour and taste. Alcohol has been produced for thousands of years both professionally and in the home. It is produced by fermentation - the action of water and yeast on sugars of various types of grains, vegetables and fruits.

Short-term effects

The effects of alcohol vary from person to person. They depend on: overall health, age, gender, body size, the amount of alcohol consumed, whether alcohol is combined with other drugs, and the person's experience (i.e. tolerance).

Short-term effects can include:

- Relaxation
- Feeling of well being
- Slower reactions
- Slurred speech
- Aggression
- Blurred vision
- Loss of inhibitions
- Uncoordinated movements
- Unclear judgement
- Flushing, dizziness

Long-term effects

Regular excessive drinking can cause a variety of health, personal and social problems. Damage to some of the body organs can be permanent.

Long-term effects can include:

- Stomach inflammation
- Liver and brain damage
- Poor diet
- Memory loss, confused thinking
- Sexual impotence
- Skin problems
- Relationship problems
- Financial difficulties
- Poor work performance

Binge drinking

Binge drinking is drinking heavily over a few hours, or continuously over days or weeks. Binge drinking is dangerous because it results in acute intoxication. Apart from health risks, this can stop people thinking clearly and they may put themselves in dangerous situations.

After-effects of binge drinking episodes include: headaches, hangovers, shakiness, nausea and vomiting.

Affect on pregnancy

Alcohol crosses the placenta to the baby. This can lead to problems in pregnancy such as bleeding, miscarriage, premature birth and stillbirth.

Drinking at any time during pregnancy could affect the normal development of the baby. Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) is a group of birth defects caused by consumption of alcohol during pregnancy.

The World Health Organisation suggests that there is no safe level of drinking alcohol during pregnancy, and that no alcohol at all is the safest approach.

Alcohol...

Standard drinks

Standard drinks are a simple way of monitoring alcohol consumption. A standard drink contains ten grams of pure alcohol. Different types of alcoholic drinks contain different amounts of pure alcohol. It is important to check the packaging to find out how much!

Low-risk drinking guidelines

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) has developed guidelines for men and women for low-risk drinking.

Guideline 1:

For healthy men and women, drinking no more than two standard drinks on any day reduces the lifetime risk of harm from alcohol-related disease or injury.

Guideline 2:

For healthy men and women, drinking no more than four standard drinks on a single occasion reduces the risk of alcohol related injury arising from that occasion.

Guideline 3:

3A Parents and carers should be advised that children under 15 years of age are at the greatest risk of harm from drinking and that for this age group, not drinking alcohol is especially important.

3B For young people aged 15–17 years the safest option is to delay the initiation of drinking for as long as possible.

Guideline 4:

4A For women who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, not drinking is the safest option.

4B For women who are breastfeeding, not drinking is the safest option.

References

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For more information on these and other topics contact:

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DRUG ARM National Office

24 Hamilton Place, BOWEN HILLS QLD 4006. GPO Box 590 BRISBANE QLD 4001

Phone: 1300 656 800 Email: library@drugarm.com.au Web: www.drugarm.com.au