

NIH Easy-to-Read Drug Facts

National Institute on Drug Abuse

Effects of Alcohol on Brains and Bodies



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Being drunk makes you more likely to get hurt or killed. Alcohol is involved in many deadly car crashes.

These are just some of the problems alcohol can cause:

Diseases

Heavy drinking over the years can raise your risk for stroke (a “brain attack”), cancer, liver disease, and other illnesses.

People can forget to use condoms when they're drunk. They can then have unsafe sex and get HIV/AIDS or hepatitis (a liver disease).

Problems with Your Baby

If a pregnant woman drinks alcohol, it can cause brain damage, which can lead to other health problems in the baby.

Accidents or Death

Being drunk makes you more likely to get hurt or killed. Alcohol is involved in:

- 60 percent of drownings, murders, and deadly burns
- 50 percent of severe injuries and sexual attacks
- 40 percent of deadly driving crashes, deadly falls, and suicides

Brain Damage

Heavy drinking over the years can permanently hurt your brain cells. This can make it hard to walk, remember, or learn new things.

Alcohol Poisoning

You can die from drinking a lot of alcohol at one time, called alcohol poisoning. It can especially happen to young people who are not used to drinking.

Signs of alcohol poisoning:

- confusion
- throwing up
- slowed breathing
- cold, blue skin
- coma (you can't wake them up)
- seizures (when your body starts twitching and jerking uncontrollably)

If someone you know has any of these signs, you should call 911 right away.

Addiction

You can get addicted to alcohol just like other drugs. Over time, alcohol can change the way your brain works. If you stop drinking alcohol, your body can get confused and you can start to feel really sick. This makes it hard to stop. This is called addiction.

People who are trying to quit drinking might:

- feel nervous and sad
- shake
- sweat
- have trouble sleeping

They will feel a very strong need to drink alcohol.

Fortunately, there are medicines and other treatments that can help someone recover from alcohol addiction.

Remember that even if you get treatment, it can be hard to stop drinking. People who stopped using alcohol can still feel strong cravings to have a drink, sometimes even years later. This is normal. This is also why it's important to stay in treatment for as long as your doctor suggests, and learn to enjoy friendships and activities that do not center on drinking.