

Young People and Alcohol



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Masculine pronouns are used generically in this document.

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Alcohol...

We all seek pleasure: the pleasure of being with friends, having fun, making plans, experiencing new things.

In our society, alcohol is often part and parcel of pleasurable experiences and social activities such as parties. Wine, beer and hard liquor are common consumer products. Alcohol consumption is not a problem for most people, but part of a healthy lifestyle. However, before deciding where, when and how much to drink, you have to be knowledgeable about drinking and drink intelligently.

If you choose to drink, drinking in a “thoughtful” manner means:

- drinking moderately;
- drinking slowly and never guzzling your drink;
- knowing why you drink (for pleasure or to escape your problems);
- being sure your drinking is not harmful to your health and your normal activities, such as studying, driving and working;
- realizing that you can have fun without drinking.

With alcohol...

You may decide not to drink because you:

- can have a good time without drinking;
- don't like the taste of alcohol;
- want to have control over yourself at all times;
- don't want to get used to drinking;
- don't want to be dependent on alcohol.

You may decide to drink intelligently, which means:

- drinking slowly, and enjoying each sip;
- eating while you drink in order to slow the effect of the alcohol;
- limiting your drinks by spacing them over a longer period;
- never guzzling your drink;
- drinking socially, or occasionally to relax.

You may decide to drink to excess, which means:

- thinking you are able to drink a lot without getting drunk;
- thinking you have a high tolerance to alcohol;
- drinking to the point of losing control;
- drinking until you are drunk;
- drinking more and more often and for all sorts of reasons.



The physical effects of alcohol

It quickly enters the bloodstream

It goes directly from the stomach to the blood. Food slows its effect.

It numbs the brain

It impairs judgment, lowers inhibitions and reduces coordination. It makes you do things you would not otherwise do.



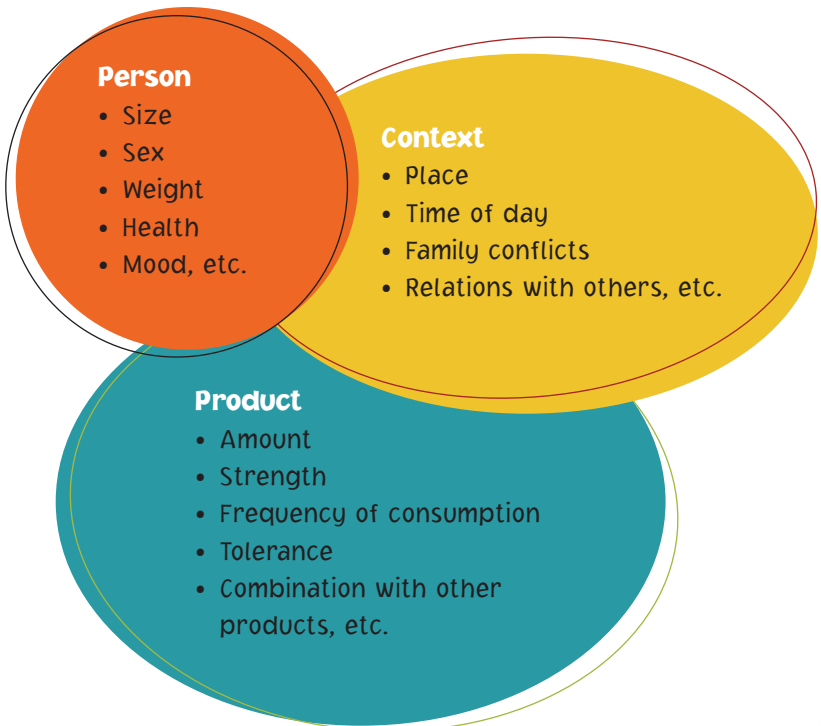
It is transformed by the liver:

It is very slowly eliminated by the liver, which filters it.

Generally speaking, the body needs an hour to eliminate each drink, that is, a small beer (350 ml), a glass of rum (45 ml) or a glass of wine (150 ml). If you have had more than one drink in an hour or if you have had several drinks during the evening, you must wait more than an hour to get back to normal!

Alcohol has a quicker effect if you drink it on an empty stomach, too fast or combined with another substance, such as a medication or a drug. It also has a quicker effect on a smaller person and someone who is tired.

Lastly, you should realize that the effect of alcohol depends on the interaction of three factors: the person, the context and the product.



Prolonged alcohol abuse causes...

PHYSICAL PROBLEMS

Liver: risk of cirrhosis, cancer and other damage.

Muscles: slackening and weakening.

Digestive system: risk of stomach ulcers and cancer of the mouth, throat and stomach.

Heart and circulation: heart disease and blood pressure problems.

Nervous system: nerve and brain damage.

Sexual organs: risk of impotence and sterility. Greater risk of fetal malformations when pregnant women drink.

PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

Low self-esteem.

Problems asserting yourself.

Behaviour changes:

Altered judgment, anger, agitation, a tendency to cut yourself off from the rest of the world, and difficulties facing life's problems.



Having an alcohol problem means you:

- drink to excess (too much and too frequently);
- drink to evade problems, to cut yourself off from society;
- need increasing amounts of alcohol to achieve the same effect as before (greater tolerance);
- neglect your usual activities because of drinking;
- do things you regret once the alcohol wears off;
- drink to the point that you put your health, safety and well-being in jeopardy;
- are unable to do without alcohol.

One gets drunk gradually

After an hour: you relax

- You talk a bit more.
- You're less inhibited.
- You're enjoying yourself.
- You feel you are leaving your cares behind.
- You may become more emotional, more sentimental, more excited.

If you drink more, or too much, you become drunk

- Your judgment is impaired and you become dizzy.
- Your reactions are slower and your vision is blurred.
- You stagger.
- Your speech is slurred.
- You may get angry.
- You are confused.
- You lose your balance.
- You see double.
- You aren't really sure where you are.



If you don't stop drinking:

- you talk nonsense;
- your ideas are completely muddled;
- you can't walk; and,
- if you drink a lot and too quickly, alcohol can cause respiratory failure and death.



Chugging... a dangerous behaviour

Chugging involves drinking a large quantity of alcohol in a short time. Often chugging alcohol is done as part of a challenge or test.

EXAMPLES OF CONSUMPTION	ALCOHOL LEVELS*	EFFECTS
Woman (125 lb. or 57 kg) 5 to 6 drinks	200 to 300 mg/100 ml	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incoherent language • Mental confusion • Increased tolerance to pain • Drowsiness • Vomiting
Man (175 lb. or 80 kg) 8 to 12 drinks		
Woman (125 lb. or 57 kg) 7 to 9 drinks	300 to 400 mg/100 ml	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deep sleep • Major decrease in reaction time • Excessive sweating or cold skin • Vomiting
Man (175 lb. or 80 kg) 13 to 16 drinks		
Woman (125 lb. or 57 kg) 10 or more drinks	More than 400 mg/100 ml	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unconsciousness • Weak pulse • Absence of reflexes • Coma • Death from respiratory arrest
Man (175 lb. or 80 kg) 17 or more drinks		

* Alcohol levels for a woman and for a man.
 Source: *Drugs: Know the Facts, Cut the Risks.*
 Comité permanent de lutte à la toxicomanie, 2004.

WHAT IS A LARGE QUANTITY OF ALCOHOL?

When the alcohol level in a person's blood is 200 mg/100 ml or more, acute alcohol poisoning occurs.

WHAT TO DO

CAUTION!
HIGH RISK

May need medical assistance

CAUTION!

Medical assistance required

Call 911

Never leave a person alone
Talk to them and try find out how much alcohol
the person drank

Chugging is like playing russian roulette

Chugging can lead to serious alcohol poisoning or even death. There have already been many reports in the media about young people dying from acute alcohol poisoning.

A person with alcohol poisoning can die in under an hour. Therefore it is important to pay close attention to any developments in signs in a person who has drunk a large amount of alcohol in a short period of time.

What Can You Do for Alcohol Poisoning?

After consuming alcohol or taking other drugs, if one of your friends has one or more of the following signs:

- Major decrease in reaction time or no reactions
- Loss of consciousness or deep sleep
- Problems breathing
- Weak pulse
- Repeated vomiting
- Excessive sweating
- Skin that is moist or cold to the touch (hypothermia)

Immediately call 911. Never leave a person with one or more of these signs alone.

Are you unsure about how seriously intoxicated a person is?

Stay by that person and call the **Info-Santé** line in your region or the **Poison Control Centre (1-800-463-5060)**... both these services will be able to help you.

Don't play with fire

If you decide to drink alcohol, you should know that the more you drink at one time, the higher the risks for your health. In general, you should never drink more than four standard drinks on a given occasion.

After the second drink for women and the third drink for men, the authorized blood alcohol rate for driving a motor vehicle in Quebec (80 mg/100 ml) may be exceeded. When combined with drugs or medication, a single drink, even if it contains little alcohol, may have immediate adverse effects.

WHAT IS A STANDARD DRINK?



Source: *Drugs: Know the Facts, Cut the Risks*. Comité permanent de lutte à la toxicomanie, 2004.

There may be advantages but there are disadvantages



Emotions

With alcohol, you forget your disappointments and inhibitions, stress may disappear and you experience greater emotional intensity.

But...

Alcohol can prevent you from seeing your real problems. It can be a means of evading reality. It can prevent your feelings from developing normally. It can create a gulf between you and your friends. It can lead to loneliness.

ages to drinking, also



Instead of drinking to get away from your problems, you should:

- try to solve them, rather than hoping they will go away on their own;
- talk them over with someone you trust;
- seek help in solving them.



Personality

When you drink, you assert yourself, show off and dramatize things. You think you are exciting and smart. Drinking might even change your entire personality.

But...

You forget that your senses are diminished. You can easily lose all control. You brag, become sullen, exceed your limitations. You're no longer yourself.

Sexuality

Alcohol can help you take the first step in approaching others. It can liberate you sexually. It can help you let go and forget taboos.

But...

Your sex drive diminishes rapidly. Your sense of values and your judgment are impaired. You may engage in dangerous sexual behaviour.

Resistance

Alcohol gives you energy. It provides calories.

But...

It has no nutritional value. It provides none of the vitamins or protein you need. It reduces your reflexes and your resistance to infection.





Dangerous combinations

ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS

Alcohol is a drug. Other drugs heighten its effects.

Tranquilizers

A little alcohol taken with a small dose of sedatives or sleeping pills can make you lose consciousness.

Marijuana and hashish

Mixing these drugs with alcohol is dangerous. It can make you disoriented and confused.

Medications

Some over-the-counter medications for colds, fever and so on are dangerous when absorbed with alcohol.

Drinking and driving

The facts

In Québec, alcohol is the main cause of highway accidents. Impaired driving is also the main cause of highway deaths. A 16-to-19-year old who drives with a blood alcohol level (BAL) of 80 mg/100 ml (0.08)¹ runs a 40 times higher risk of having an accident than a person the same age who drives sober. (Source: *Société de l'assurance automobile du Québec*).

The law

The BAL permitted is 80 mg/100 ml. Above that limit, a driver commits an offence under the *Criminal Code*. Judgment and reflexes are affected with a level as low as 30 mg/100 ml of alcohol. Penalties are severe for drunk drivers: suspension of their licence on the spot, heavy fines and possible imprisonment.

Zero tolerance for new drivers

The law prohibits new drivers, i.e. holders of learner's and probationary licences, from drinking.

1. 80 mg of alcohol per 100 ml of blood.



You are responsible for yourself and for others.

If you drink, don't drive!

Organizing a party

- Lay down clear rules with your friends about driving.
- Choose a designated driver who will not drink and to whom you give your keys when you arrive at the party.
- Serve guests food, and soft drinks, fruit juices or water.
- Alternate alcohol and water to quench your thirst.
- After the party, walk home or take public transportation or a taxi, or call your parents or friends to pick you up.
- Before driving, wait until the alcohol you drank is eliminated from your body.

If you decide to drink

Drink intelligently

- Space your drinks over a period of time.
- Limit the number of drinks and don't drink every day.
- Eat when drinking.
- Never try to show off how much you can drink.
- And, especially, don't drink to solve your problems.

Be aware of the risks

Drinking too much can make you sick. If you drink too often, you can become dependent on alcohol.

Respect non-drinkers

- Take their choices into consideration.
- Understand that the reasons for not drinking are as good as the reasons for drinking.



If you decide not to drink

Stick with your decision

Be proud of your decision. Resist pressure.

You don't have to give any reasons

It's hard to say "No thank you", but say it naturally and firmly. You don't have to defend yourself or explain your decision.

Choose your activities

It isn't always necessary to drink to have fun. Sports, music, video games are just as much fun without alcohol.

Respect the decision of those who drink

If some people have decided to drink, accept their decision. If people drink too much, don't make fun of them or feel superior. If they become rude or annoying, just walk away or help them if they need it. It is difficult to talk to people who have had too much to drink, but you can try to make them understand that their behaviour is irritating. When they sober up, tell them how they acted and how bothersome they were. You can also try to help them understand why they drank too much.



Questions

Does coffee reduce the effects of alcohol?

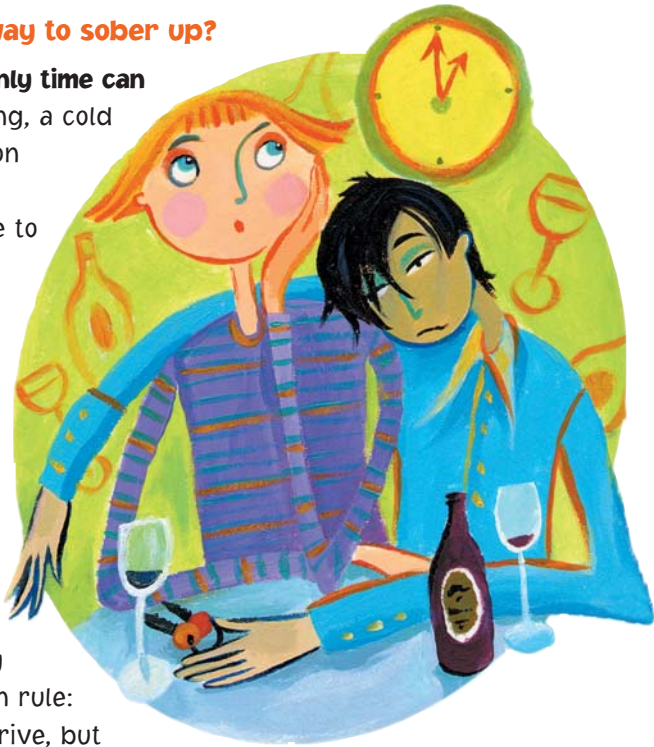
There is no magic potion that prevents alcohol from being absorbed into the bloodstream. Eating before or while you drink slows down its effects. But no matter what you do, you'll get drunk if you drink too much.

What is the fastest way to sober up?

There is no fast way. **Only time can do it.** Dancing, exercising, a cold shower, coffee and so on won't make you sober. That's a myth. You have to wait for your body to eliminate the alcohol you drank.

After drinking, when is it safe to drive?

There is no easy answer, but generally you should wait at least an hour for every drink taken. The golden rule: When in doubt, don't drive, but find a safe solution to ending the evening (take a taxi home, have someone drive you, sleep over, etc).



Do you have an alcohol problem?

Talk it over with someone you trust, such as a family member, a friend, a teacher, a social worker, the school psychologist, a nurse or an educator.

If you need help or information, you can also call:

Drugs: Help and Referral

Montréal area: **(514) 527-2626**

Elsewhere in Québec: **1 800 265-2626**

Free. Confidential.

24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Tel-jeunes (youth hotline)

Montréal area: **(514) 288-2266**

Elsewhere in Québec: **1 800 263-2266**

Free. Confidential.

24 hours a day, 7 days a week.



There are also specialized assistance and support services in Québec for teens who have an alcohol problem. To find out more about the services, contact your centre de santé et de services sociaux.



www.msss.gouv.qc.ca

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