

HANDS-ON Health

Health Wave Newsletter, April 2013

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DID YOU KNOW?

- On average, underage drinkers consume more drinks per drinking occasion than adult drinkers.
- In 2008, there were approximately 190,000 emergency room visits by persons under age 21 for injuries and other conditions linked to alcohol.
- More than 2/3 of 12th graders, 1/5 of 10th graders, and 1/3 of 8th graders have consumed alcohol at some point in their lives.
- In 2009, 10,839 people were killed in crashes involving alcohol in the United States.
- Alcohol is a leading contributor to injury death, the main cause of death for people under the age of 21.
- Parents can have a major impact on their children's drinking, especially during the pre-teen and early teen years.

April is Alcohol Awareness Month

According to the CDC, alcohol use by persons under age 21 years is a major public health problem. Alcohol is the most commonly used and abused drug among youth in the United States, more than tobacco and illicit drugs. Although drinking by persons under the age of 21 is illegal, people aged 12 to 20 years drink 11% of all alcohol consumed in the United States.

Each April, the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD) sponsors Alcohol Awareness Month to increase public awareness, reduce stigma and encourage local communities to focus on alcoholism and alcohol-related issues. This year's theme is "Help for Today, Hope for Tomorrow." "Underage drinking is a complex issue," says Robert J. Lindsey, President/CEO of NCADD, "one that can only be solved through a sustained and cooperative effort. As a nation, we need to wake up to the reality that for some, alcoholism and addiction develop at a young age and that intervention, treatment, and recovery support are essential for them and their families," says Lindsey. "We can't afford to wait any longer."

For more information about NCADD-sponsored activities, visit the NCADD website at: www.ncadd.org

Consequences of Underage Drinking

Youth who drink alcohol are more likely to experience:

- **School problems**, such as higher absence and poor or failing grades.
- **Social problems**, such as fighting and lack of participation in youth activities.
- **Legal problems**, such as arrest for driving or physically hurting someone while drunk.
- **Physical problems**, such as hangovers or illnesses.
- **Unwanted, unplanned, and unprotected sexual activity.**
- **Disruption of normal growth** and sexual development.
- **Physical and sexual assault.**
- **Higher risk for suicide and homicide.**
- **Alcohol-related car crashes and other unintentional injuries**, such as burns, falls, and drowning.
- **Memory problems.**



- **Abuse of other drugs.**
- **Changes in brain development** that may have life-long effects.
- **Death from alcohol poisoning.**

In general, the risk of youth experiencing these problems is greater for those who binge drink than for those who do not binge drink.

Long-Term Health Effects of Alcohol Abuse:

MALNUTRITION:

Alcohol abuse destroys the cells lining the stomach, preventing absorption of important nutrients. It also interferes with the breakdown of nutrients into usable molecules by decreasing the number of digestive enzymes.

BRAIN:

- Chronic abuse destroys healthy brain cells, due to decreased oxygen supply to the brain.
- Decreased oxygen supply may be responsible for the “blackouts” and amnesia experienced when a person is drunk.

- Destruction of brain cells can also result in emotional disturbances and mental disorders.

HEART:

Chronic alcohol abuse has been shown to cause irregular heart beats. It is also a risk factor for heart attacks, strokes, and other forms of heart disease.

THE DIGESTIVE SYSTEM:

Chronic alcohol abuse results in irritation and inflammation of the upper gastrointestinal (GI) system (the mouth, esophagus, and stomach).

LIVER DAMAGE:

The liver is the largest organ in the body, and it performs many functions which are essential to life. Alcohol abusers may have one of the three alcohol-related liver conditions listed below, or any combination of them.

Traditionally, these three conditions were believed to be sequentially related, progressing from fatty liver to alcoholic hepatitis to cirrhosis. However, recent studies demonstrate that alcoholics may progress to cirrhosis without having the other two conditions.

FATTY LIVER: In fatty liver disease, there is a disruption of the distribution of nutrients and oxygen to the liver cells. If the person stops drinking, fairly normal liver function will resume.

ALCOHOLIC HEPATITIS: In some heavy drinkers, alcohol consumption leads to severe alcoholic hepatitis, an inflammation of the liver characterized by fever, jaundice, and abdominal pain. Abstinence and good nutrition will help to restore some of the affected liver function. This condition has a mortality rate of 10-30%.

CIRRHOSIS: In Cirrhosis, liver cells harden, turn yellow-orange, and they die. This means there is permanent loss of function to part of the liver. Cirrhosis is irreversible and fatal.

CANCER:

- Considerable evidence suggests a connection between heavy alcohol consumption and increased risk for cancer.
- Strong associations exist between alcohol use and cancers of the esophagus and mouth. A more controversial association links alcohol with liver, breast, and colorectal cancers.

PREGNANT WOMEN:

- Alcohol itself is toxic to the fetus, but accompanying nutritional deficiencies can also affect fetal development.
- Nutritional needs during pregnancy are 10% to 30% greater than normal. Not only can nutritional deficiency of an alcoholic mother adversely affect the nutrition of the mother, but it also can restrict nutrition flow to the fetus.
- Some of the effects of alcohol on a newborn include low birth weight, learning deficits, and withdrawal.



Why Teens May Choose To Drink

An adolescent's decision to use alcohol is influenced by many factors, some physical, some emotional, and some environmental. These factors also influence each other. They include:

- The social systems in which teens live
- The increase in risk-taking that usually accompanies adolescence
- Decreased parental supervision and greater independence
- Increased time spent alone and with peers
- Increased stress
- What adolescents see and hear about alcohol

Tips for Communicating With Your Teen

Developing open, trusting communication between you and your child is essential to helping your child avoid alcohol use. If your child feels comfortable talking openly with you, you'll have a greater chance of guiding him or her toward healthy decision-making. Some ways to begin:

Encourage conversation.

Encourage your child to talk about whatever interests him or her. Listen without interruption and give your child a chance to teach you something new. Your active listening to your child's enthusiasms paves the way for conversation about topics that concern you.

Ask open-ended questions.

Encourage your teen to tell you how he or she thinks and feels about the issue you're discussing. Avoid questions that have a simple "yes" or "no" answer.

Control your emotions. If you hear something you don't like, try not to respond with anger. Instead, take a few deep breaths and acknowledge your feelings in a constructive way.



Make every conversation a "win-win" experience. Don't lecture or try to "score points" on your teen by showing how he or she is wrong. If you show respect for your child's viewpoint, he or she will be more likely to listen to you and respect yours.

(Source: *Make a Difference—Talk to Your Child About Alcohol*. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse. US Department of Health and Human Services).

Where To Get Help

- www.alcoholfreechildren.org
- SAMHSA Substance Abuse Facility Locator: <http://www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov/>
- State offices of alcohol and drug abuse (see your phone book)
- Local chapters of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) <http://www.aa.org>
- National Council on Alcoholism <http://www.ncadd.org/>

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