



## Facts About Alcohol



**Alcohol is made from natural ingredients such as fruits, vegetables, and grains that are either distilled or fermented.** Alcohol has a long history of use around the world. People use alcohol for religious purposes, special ceremonies, social gatherings, and for personal reasons. People also use alcohol in cooking and sometimes in medicines. The most common use for alcohol is at social gatherings, such as weddings, holidays, or parties, although some people drink alcohol when they are by themselves.

**Alcohol is a drug, and it is the most commonly used legal drug in the United States.** Alcohol is considered a drug because of the impact it has on the body. Drinking alcohol **slows** down a person's heart rate and breathing; it is considered a **depressant**. Alcohol also affects the way the brain works. It mainly affects the front part of the brain that controls our thinking, self-control, and ability to make decisions. When people have had one or two drinks, they may seem silly or more lively and talkative. Actually, they have less self-control. People who consume alcoholic beverages sometimes engage in behaviors that they normally wouldn't do. When compared to non-drinkers, drinkers are more likely to give in to peer pressure, engage in criminal activity, participate in high-risk sexual behavior, and make the decision to drink and drive.

**Many unpleasant things can happen when a person drinks alcohol.** Just a little bit of alcohol can make some drinkers act aggressive, violent, sad, or depressed. Even small amounts of alcohol can cause problems with how the brain works, affecting how a person thinks and remembers. Moderate to heavy amounts of alcohol make people feel dizzy, weak, clumsy, unable to speak clearly, and unable to walk. They have a hard time staying awake, and some people experience "blackouts" (a period of time where a person has no memories of where they have been or what they have done). Larger amounts of alcohol can lead to breathing difficulties, and people **can die** from overdoses of alcohol.

**Long term use of alcohol affects the entire body.** It increases the risk of having a heart attack or stroke, and it damages the liver and kidneys. Alcohol can cause a number of other health problems as well. Women who drink alcohol while they are pregnant may have babies with birth defects, including Fetal Alcohol Syndrome.

**People can become addicted to alcohol.** As with other drugs, a person can become **physically** addicted - - this means that the body needs more and more alcohol over time in order to get the "high" or the desired feeling. As a person drinks more and more, his or her body begins to need alcohol, which means that the person is addicted. A person may also become **mentally** or psychologically addicted - - this is when the feeling of being high or drunk becomes their focus, they want to drink in order to get this feeling. When a person drinks in order to cope with feelings or to escape from problems, he or she may also become psychologically addicted to alcohol. Alcohol can contribute to problems finding and keeping friends, getting along with others, and having positive self esteem.



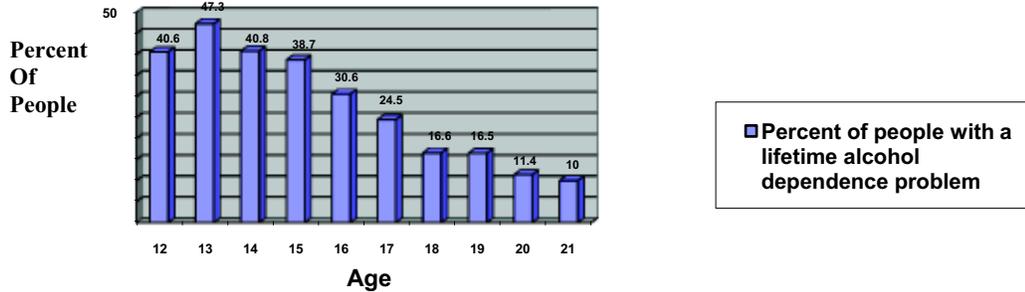
**Alcohol abuse causes many serious problems in our society.** Families where alcohol abuse is present often experience a number of problems including violence and negligence. The use of alcohol can affect a person's ability to keep a job, do well in school, make friends, be healthy, and succeed in life. Alcoholism is a disease that can run in families, and children of parents with alcohol problems are at a higher risk for having their own alcohol or other drug problems.



## EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL

Research has found that the earlier a person takes their first drink, the more likely they are to have a lifetime alcohol dependence problem.

Prevalence of Lifetime Alcohol Dependence



For example, if a person takes their first drink at age 13, there is an almost 50% chance that they will have a lifetime alcohol dependence problem.

The chart to the left shows this relationship graphically.

**A person does not have to be an alcoholic to have problems with alcohol.** Every year, many young people die or become disabled in alcohol-related *accidents, drownings, and suicides*. Also, serious injury or death can result when a person who has been drinking operates machinery.

In 2006, an estimated 17,602 people died in alcohol-related traffic crashes—an average of one every 30 minutes. These deaths constitute 41 percent of the 42,642 total traffic fatalities.

About three in every ten Americans will be involved in an alcohol-related crash at some time in their lives.

In 2001, more than half a million people were injured in crashes where police reported that alcohol was present — an average of one person injured almost every minute.

Alcohol use is also linked with a number of *other behavioral problems*. The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (2003) found that youth actively using alcohol were more likely to engage in delinquent behaviors such as: participating in fights at school or work, participating in group fights, attacking others with the intent to harm, theft, selling illicit drugs and carrying a handgun.

Even though alcohol causes many problems, many people still choose to drink it and more people use alcohol than any other type of drug. Despite the number of problems alcohol can cause, it is legal for people 21 years of age or older to drink in our society. Alcohol is the most abused substance in our country.

### REFERENCES:

Taken from National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Website:

- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. “2006 Traffic Safety Annual Assessment – A Preview.” DOT 810 791. Washington DC: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, July 2007. <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/810791.PDF>
- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. “Traffic Safety Facts 2006: Alcohol Impaired Driving.” DOT 810 801. Washington DC: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 2008. <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/810801.PDF>
- [http://www.nhtsa.gov/staticfiles/nti/enforcement/pdf/Countermeasures\\_HS811258.pdf](http://www.nhtsa.gov/staticfiles/nti/enforcement/pdf/Countermeasures_HS811258.pdf)

