



Alcohol 101

A product that is only legal for those that are 21 years of age, alcohol is a depressant that comes from organic sources including grapes, grains and berries. These products are fermented and distilled into a liquid.

Alcohol affects every part of the body. It is carried through the bloodstream to the brain, stomach, internal organs, liver, kidneys, muscles – everywhere. It is absorbed very quickly (as short as 5 - 10 minutes) and can stay in the body for several hours.¹

Alcohol affects the central nervous system and brain. It can make users loosen up, relax, and feel more comfortable, or can make them more aggressive.

Unfortunately, it also lowers their inhibitions, which can set them up for embarrassing or dangerous behavior. In fact, each year approximately 5,000 young people under the age of 21 die as a result of underage drinking. This statistic includes about 1,900 deaths from motor vehicle accidents; 1,600 homicides; 300 suicides; and hundreds of others stemming from injuries such as falls, burns and drownings.²

A standard drink is:

One 12-ounce bottle of beer or wine cooler;



One 5-ounce glass of wine; or
1.5 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits.³

Health Hazards

It's no secret that society gives children mixed messages about alcohol. As a parent, you should know that underage drinking can have serious consequences. The teenage brain is still developing. Did you know that alcohol can impair the parts of the brain that control the following:

- **Motor coordination.** This includes the ability to walk, drive and process information.⁴
- **Impulse control.** Drinking lowers inhibitions and increases the chances that a person will do something that they will regret when they are sober.⁵
- **Memory.** Impaired recollection and even blackouts can occur when too much alcohol has been consumed.⁶
- **Judgment and decision making capacity.** Drinking may lead young people to engage in risky behaviors that can result in illness, injury and even death.⁷



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Risky Behavior

Many kids start drinking in middle school. In fact, one out of every two 8th graders has tried alcohol.⁸ Additionally, more kids use alcohol than use tobacco or illicit drugs and more children are killed by alcohol than all illegal drugs combined.⁹

But the risky behavior does not end there.

- **Dependence.** People who reported starting to drink before the age of 15 were four times more likely to also report meeting the criteria for alcohol dependence at some point in their lives. In fact, new research shows that the serious drinking problems (including what is called alcoholism) typically associated with middle age actually begin to appear much earlier, during young adulthood and even adolescence.¹⁰
- **Illicit drug use.** More than 67 percent of young people who start drinking before the age of 15 will try an illicit drug. Children who drink are over 7 times more likely to use any illicit drug, are over 22 times more likely to use marijuana, and 50 times more likely to use cocaine than children who never drink.¹¹
- **Sexual activity.** Alcohol use by teens is a strong predictor of both sexual activity and unprotected sex. A survey of high school students found that 18 percent of females and 39 percent of males say it is acceptable for a boy to force sex if the girl is high or drunk.¹²
- **Violence.** Children who start drinking before age 15 are 12 times more likely to be injured while under the influence of alcohol and 10 times more likely to be in a fight after drinking, compared with those who wait until they are 21 to drink.¹³
- **School.** Student substance use precedes, and is a risk factor for, academic problems, such as lower grades, absenteeism and high dropout rates. Alcohol can interfere with a student's ability to think, making learning and concentration more difficult and ultimately impeding academic performance. In fact, the more a student uses alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, the lower his grade point average is likely to be and the more likely he is to drop out of school.¹⁴
- **Driving.** When young people drink and get into a car, they tend to make poor decisions that impact their safety. Traffic crashes are the number one killer of teens and over one-third of teen traffic deaths are alcohol-related.¹⁵

Protecting Children

Parents can take the following steps to encourage their children to abstain from alcohol:

- Spend time together regularly.
- Listen and talk with your children. Try to understand the pressures placed on them and don't criticize their beliefs.
- Keep track of where your children are, what they are doing, and who their friends are.
- Get them involved in after-school activities so they won't be able to just "hang out" with friends in the afternoon. This is when children are most likely to experiment.
- Praise or reward children often. If they feel good about themselves, they will be more confident and better able to resist peer pressure.
- Be a positive role model for your children. Don't abuse alcohol or drugs.

For more information about talking with your teen about alcohol, tips for your teen to handle peer pressure, and warning signs of a drinking problem, please refer to: The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism's pamphlet: [Make A Difference: Talk to Your Child About Alcohol - Parents Booklet](#) at www.NIAAA.com