

# Alcohol Awareness



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# Alcohol: friend or foe?

## The answer isn't cut and dry

Alcohol can be both tonic and poison. Literature suggesting that light to moderate drinking presents a plethora of health benefits can be found if people go looking for it. However, alcohol also has its detractors, who say that the risks outweigh the benefits when it comes to drinking. This makes it even more complicated to decide if consuming alcohol is something that can safely be included in one's lifestyle or if it's something to be avoided.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says that alcohol can affect every organ in the body. It is a central nervous system depressant that is rapidly absorbed from the stomach and small intestine into the bloodstream. The Mayo Clinic advises that moderate alcohol consumption may provide some health benefits. These can include reducing risk of developing and dying from heart disease. There's a possible reduction in the risk of

ischemic stroke, which occurs when the arteries to the brain narrow or become blocked, impacting blood flow. Some think that moderate alcohol consumption may reduce one's risk of diabetes.

The Harvard Medical School indicates that moderate drinking protecting against cardiovascular disease and diabetes makes sense biologically and scientifically. Moderate amounts of alcohol raise levels of high-density lipoprotein (HDL, or "good" cholesterol), and higher HDL levels are associated with greater protection against heart disease. Moderate alcohol consumption has also been linked with beneficial changes ranging from greater sensitivity to insulin to improvements in factors that influence blood clotting.

Alcohol has a dark side, too. Its most pronounced issue is the toll it can take on the liver. Heavy

alcohol use can cause inflammation or scarring of the liver. The World Cancer Research Fund also ties alcohol to cancers of the mouth, pharynx, larynx, esophagus, breast, liver, colon, and rectum. People who cannot control their drinking can develop addictions that affect both their personal and professional lives.

Moderation is essential when consuming alcohol. Those who do not currently drink are not advised to do so just for the potential health benefits. However, people who have one to two drinks (12 ounces of beer, eight ounces of malt liquor, five ounces of wine, or 1.5 ounces of liquor) on a regular basis and are healthy overall should generally have few problems, according to the Mayo Clinic. Still, it is always best to consult with a physician about alcohol consumption and its potential effects on one's overall health.

# The effects of alcohol on the body

According to the 2015 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 56 percent of adults age 18 and over reported drinking alcohol in the past month. The prevalence of alcohol is undeniable, and many drinkers seem unfazed by the short- and long-term effects of alcohol consumption. While drinking in moderation may not necessarily prove harmful, the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism notes that excessive alcohol consumption, whether it's on a single occasion or over time, can take a serious toll on various areas of the body.

- **Brain:** Alcohol can affect how the brain looks and works, interfering with its communication pathways and potentially disrupting one's mood and behavior. In addition, alcohol can affect a person's ability to think clearly and adversely affect coordination.
- **Heart:** Heart problems associated with longtime excessive alcohol consumption or even too much alcohol on a single occasion include cardiomyopathy, a disease of the heart muscle

that compromises its ability to pump blood to the rest of the body. Irregular heart beat, stroke and high blood pressure are some additional heart conditions that can result from excessive alcohol consumption.

- **Pancreas:** The pancreas is a gland located in the abdomen that, among other things, aids in the digestive process. The NIAAA notes that alcohol causes the pancreas to produce toxic substances that can lead to pancreatitis. An inflammation and swelling of blood vessels in the pancreas, pancreatitis can prevent proper digestion and produce pain in the upper abdomen that can spread to the back as well.
- **Liver:** Cirrhosis, a chronic disease of the liver that's often linked to alcoholism, may be the most widely known liver disease associated with alcohol. However, additional diseases, including alcoholic hepatitis, fibrosis and steatosis also may result from heavy drinking. Roughly 35 percent of long-term drinkers develop alcoholic hepatitis, the

presence of which may require liver transplants if other courses of treatment, such as dietary changes and quitting alcohol, are ineffective. Fibrosis refers to scar tissue in the liver, while the Cleveland Clinic notes that steatosis, or fatty liver, that occurs after acute alcohol ingestion is generally reversible with abstinence.

- **Immune system:** Excessive alcohol consumption weakens the immune system, leaving acute and chronic heavy drinkers vulnerable to disease. Single occasion heavy drinkers may find their ability to defend themselves against infection is weakened for up to 24 hours after getting drunk. Chronic heavy drinkers are more susceptible to diseases such as pneumonia and tuberculosis than people who drink in moderation or not at all.
- **Cancer:** Excessive alcohol consumption also has been linked to a host of cancers, including cancers of the mouth, esophagus, throat, liver, and breast.

More information is available at [www.niaaa.org](http://www.niaaa.org).





## Common household poisons that put kids in harm's way

Childhood is time of exploration for youngsters. Curiosity is a healthy way for kids to broaden their horizons. However, in an effort to learn more about their worlds, children may find themselves in harm's way.

The Victoria State Government says accidental poisoning is most commonly a problem in young children. Most poisonings happen at home, but they also can occur while visiting friends and family or while on vacation. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says that more than 300 children in the United States between the ages of zero and 19 are treated in an emergency department every day, and two children die as a result of being poisoned.

Parents may think that only

chemicals with clear warning labels pose a threat to youngsters. However, many everyday items can be poisonous. Here's how to recognize some of the more common hazards lurking in typical homes.

### Alcohol/nicotine

It may only take a small amount of alcohol to make children ill. Alcohol can be found in beverages, but also in perfume, mouthwash, cleaning products, hand sanitizers, and over-the-counter cold medications. NYU Langone says alcohol poisoning in children can cause low blood sugar, which can lead to seizures and coma.

Liquid nicotine or nicotine replacement gum can be hazardous as well. Illicit substances also carry serious health consequences for

children. Changes in breathing, unconsciousness or seizures may result depending on the substance.

### Medications

Medications account for roughly half of potentially toxic exposures, according to NYU Langone Health. A child who gets into over-the-counter or prescription medications can be in real trouble. To children, medicines may seem like food, beverages, candy, or toys. Some medicines need not be ingested to be dangerous, so make sure all are kept well beyond the reach of curious tykes.

### Pesticides/herbicides

Chemicals used to treat lawns and gardens may be toxic to children and pets. It is important to read labels thoroughly and to always strictly follow instructions.

### Household plants

Houseplants can be dangerous. Although many common indoor plants only cause mild gastrointestinal symptoms if consumed, daffodils, dumb cane, foxglove, hydrangea, lilies, oleanders, rhododendrons, and wisteria, may have toxins that can affect the stomach, respiratory system, liver, or heart. Speak with a pediatrician about how to keep kids safe around these plants.

Keeping children away from potential poisons takes diligence. Certain substances may be best kept behind lock and key and/or up high where curious hands cannot reach. Homes should have the poison prevention hotline number clearly displayed. The CDC also recommends discarding unused products, medicines and vitamins to limit children's access to them.

# The effects of blood alcohol concentration

Drinking and driving puts everyone on the road in jeopardy. That includes the irresponsible men and women who consume alcohol and then get behind the wheel as well as millions of sober motorists and their passengers.

The legal blood alcohol concentration, or BAC, in many areas throughout the United States and Canada is .08. But alcohol affects people's ability to drive regardless of how much they've had to drink. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration notes that the following are some predictable effects on drivers and their ability to drive at certain BAC levels.

- **.02:** People with a BAC of .02 typically experience some loss of judgment and feelings of relaxation. Slight body warmth and altered mood are some other normal effects when a person's BAC is .02. Drivers can expect to experience a decline in visual functions and a diminished ability to perform two tasks at once when driving with a .02 BAC.
- **.05:** Exaggerated behavior, possible loss of small-muscle control, such as an ability to focus the eyes, impaired judgment, lowered alertness, and release of inhibition are some typical effects of a .05 BAC. When behind the wheel with a .05 BAC, drivers can expect reduced coordination, reduced ability to track moving objects, difficulty steering, and a reduced response to emergency driving situations.
- **.08:** At .08, muscle coordination becomes poor, affecting balance, speech, vision, reaction time, and hearing. People with a BAC of .08 will find it hard to detect danger and their judgment, self-control, reasoning, and memory will be impaired. Driving with a .08 BAC affects concentration, impairs perception and reduces drivers' ability to capably process information, including detecting other drivers' signals. Short-term memory loss also is one of the predictable effects of driving with a .08 BAC.
- **.10:** People experience a clear

deterioration of their reaction time and control when their BAC reaches .10. Slurred speech, slowed thinking and poor coordination are some additional effects of a BAC of .10. When driving with a BAC of .10, drivers have a reduced ability to maintain lane position and brake appropriately.

- **.15:** A .15 BAC is nearly twice the legal limit in many areas. People with such a high BAC will have considerably less muscle control than normal and a major loss of balance. Drivers with a .15 BAC experience substantial impairment when trying to control their vehicles and will experience difficulty paying attention to the task of driving. Drivers also will struggle to process necessary visual and auditory information.

Alcohol begins to impair people's motor skills and judgment even when consumed in small amounts. When drinking, men and women should never get behind the wheel.



## Did you know?

The cost of a DUI conviction depends on where the offense took place and the circumstances surrounding it, but men and women arrested for DUI can expect to spend thousands of dollars in fees, penalties and associated costs related to their DUI convictions. According to the California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs, first-time DUI offenders can expect to spend around \$8,900 for their transgression, and the organization acknowledges that estimate is conservative. Fines and penalties, attorney's fees, court costs, insurance premium increases, and restitution fund expenses are among the many factors the ADP considered when determining their estimate. And those costs might just be the upfront costs. The Alaska Division of Motor Vehicles estimates that the average cost of a DUI for first-time offenders in that state is closer to \$25,000. That estimate includes the cost of SR-22 insurance, which the Alaska DMV estimates at \$2,000 per year for five years. SR-22 insurance is a vehicle liability insurance document required by motor vehicle agencies in many states. The document is necessary for high-risk insurance policies, such as those whose policy holders have been convicted for DUI.



# Alcohol and breast cancer risk

Many people unwind with a glass of wine or a cocktail after a stressful day, and some research suggests that mild to moderate consumption of alcoholic beverages can have various health advantages. According to the Mayo Clinic, moderate consumption of alcohol has been linked to a lower risk of developing and dying from heart disease, possibly reducing the risk of ischemic stroke and potentially reducing the risk of diabetes. However, for some people, the risks of consuming alcohol may outweigh the benefits. Many studies show that drinking alcohol may increase the risk of breast cancer, advises the research and information organization Susan J.

Komen. The group says pooled analysis of data from 53 studies found that, for each alcoholic drink consumed per day, the relative risk for breast cancer increases by about 7 percent. Researchers aren't quite sure why there is an increased risk of breast cancer associated with alcohol intake, but experts at MD Anderson Cancer Center have some theories. Some theorize that alcohol can increase levels of estrogen and other hormones that affect breast cancer formation and growth. Excess fat can lead to an increased cancer risk, and the consumption of empty calories through drinking alcohol can lead to unwanted weight gain. Furthermore, those who

consume alcohol have increased amounts of folic acid in their systems, which can increase cancer risk. The nonprofit breast cancer organization Breastcancer.org states that, compared to women who don't drink at all, women who have three alcoholic drinks per week have a 15 percent higher risk of breast cancer. Experts also estimate that the risk of breast cancer goes up another 10 percent for each additional drink women regularly consume each day. Keep in mind that a drink is defined as 12 ounces of beer, five ounces of wine or 1.5 ounces of liquor. Women who want to do all they can to reduce their risk of developing breast cancer may want to avoid alcohol.





# New Vision at Wilson Health

New Vision at Wilson Health is a new service at the hospital designed to help people take the first step on the road to recovery. For someone whose life is controlled by alcohol or drugs, the healing process begins when they make the most important decision of their lives by asking for help.

“The battle to be free from alcohol or drug dependency is never easy, but it can be won,” said Linda Maurer, Chief Nursing Officer at Wilson Health. “We are committed to offering our patients hospital detoxification services with a compassionate and personalized approach. Every patient has unique needs in his or her personal battle and we are here to help break the cycle of addiction.”

New Vision provides medical stabilization of patients in acute withdrawal from alcohol and/or certain drugs like opioids (including pain pills and heroin), cocaine, and benzos (like Valium or Xanax).

#### **New Vision provides:**

- Medical management of the physical symptoms of withdrawal;
- A safe withdrawal from the drug(s) of dependence and enable the patient to become drug free;
- Withdrawal that is humane, and protects the patient’s dignity;
- An aftercare plan and the appropriate level of treatment upon discharge.

The New Vision service treats the physical signs and symptoms associated with withdrawal. The goal of the service is to medically manage the patient through the acute withdrawal phase so they will be more successful when starting a substance abuse treatment program.

Patients are admitted to a regular medical/surgical

floor, and patients with psychological symptoms would be best served in a dual diagnosis program. If a patient does not meet criteria for admission, the intake coordinator will refer the patient to a treatment facility in the community that does meet all of their needs.

After completing the New Vision service, the patient is referred to a treatment center to continue their recovery. New Vision staff work with each patient during their stay to determine the best fit by presenting the patient with options. The patient then chooses the plan that they feel will best accommodate their needs.

New Vision at Wilson Health provides medical stabilization to appropriate adults 18 & older who meet the admission criteria. For more information, call the New Vision staff at (937) 538-4068 or visit [www.wilsonhealth.org](http://www.wilsonhealth.org).



Are you ready to quit alcohol or prescription pain pills?

**We can help.**

**New Vision at Wilson Health helps provide a safe medical stabilization setting for those dependent on:**

- Alcohol
- Benzodiazepines (Valium, Xanax)
- Opioids (Heroin, OxyContin)
- Methamphetamine
- Cocaine
- Combined Substances
- Prescription Medications

Call for a free, confidential assessment  
**(937) 538-4068**

Or visit our website  
[wilsonhealth.org](http://wilsonhealth.org)

