

## How can I reduce my risks?

PLAN AHEAD AND STAY SAFE!



HAVE A BACK-UP PLAN FOR GETTING HOME (HAVE MONEY AND A PHONE NUMBER FOR A TAXI, OR CALL YOUR PARENTS OR A FRIEND WHOM YOU TRUST).



WHEN RELYING ON OTHERS FOR A RIDE, MAKE SURE YOU KNOW HOW MUCH THE DRIVER HAS DRUNK BEFORE DECIDING TO GET IN THE CAR (THIS INCLUDES RIDES WITH ADULTS, TOO).



IF YOU DRINK, PACE YOUR DRINKS, HAVE SOME NON-ALCOHOLIC DRINKS TOO, AND EAT BEFORE YOU DRINK AND WHILE YOU ARE DRINKING.



PLAN AHEAD FOR OVERNIGHT STAYS. MAKE SURE YOU KNOW HOW MUCH YOUR FRIENDS ARE DRINKING AND HOW THEY ARE GETTING HOME.



DON'T MIX ALCOHOL WITH MEDICINES OR ILLEGAL DRUGS. CHECK WITH YOUR PHARMACIST TO BE SURE.



## How can I get help?

Do you, a family member or a friend have a problem with substance use? If you want help, you may want to talk to someone you trust, such as your doctor, a teacher, a health nurse, or a guidance or addiction counsellor. You might also want to contact an addiction assessment centre or a self-help group such as Alcoholics Anonymous (look in the Yellow Pages of your phone book under "Addictions"). Here are some other places to look for help:

- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health's Information Centre at 1 800 463-6273
- Kids Help Phone at 1 800 668-6868
- Ontario Drug and Alcohol Registry of Treatment at 1 800 565-8603 or [www.dart.on.ca](http://www.dart.on.ca).



For more information on addiction and mental health issues, or a copy of this resource, please contact CAMH's R. Samuel McLaughlin Addiction and Mental Health Information Centre: Ontario toll-free: 1 800 463-6273 Toronto: 416 595-6111

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about

# alcohol



## What is alcohol?

Alcohol is a drug that slows down parts of your brain. Drinking alcohol can make you feel more relaxed. It can also make it harder to think clearly, make good decisions and do various tasks.

Alcohol is made by fermenting (and sometimes distilling) fruits, vegetables or grains. Alcohol itself is a clear liquid. The colour in beer, spritzers, wine and other alcoholic drinks comes from other ingredients and from the process of fermentation.



## Who uses alcohol?

Most Canadian adults drink alcohol, and do so responsibly. But because alcohol is a drug, there may be risks if you drink any amount of alcohol.

- In 2005, about two-thirds (62%) of all Ontario students (grade 7-12) reported drinking at least once in the past year. This is about 603,400 students.
- One in 10 students (10%) drank alcohol once a week.
- One in four male students (25%) and one in five females (20%) reported binge drinking (five or more drinks at one time) in the past month.
- More than half of the alcohol consumed in Canada is beer, the most popular alcoholic drink. Next are liquor (e.g., rum, vodka) at 26 per cent and wine at 21 per cent.
- Canadians spend about \$12.4 billion a year on alcohol.
- About 10 per cent of Canadians are dependent on alcohol at some time in their lives.



## true or false

1. If a female and a male both have an average body type and weigh the same, drinking the same amount of alcohol will have the same effect on each of them.
2. Coolers and regular strength beer contain the same amount of alcohol.
3. Some people can drink a lot without seeming to get drunk.
4. Drinking coffee, working up a sweat, or having a cold shower will sober you up.

1. FALSE. Males have more water in their bodies than females. This means the alcohol gets more diluted in males, and so a male will notice less effect than a female of the same body weight and body type who drank the same amount of alcohol.
2. FALSE. Most 12 oz/341 mL coolers are 6.9 per cent alcohol, while a regular 12 oz/341 mL bottle of beer is five per cent alcohol. That means there is nearly one-and-a-half times as much alcohol in a cooler as in a regular strength bottle of beer.
3. TRUE. A person who often drinks a lot may not look drunk because his or her body is used to the alcohol. But even if a person doesn't look drunk after drinking, the alcohol still has an effect. The person still has too much alcohol in his or her blood to deal safely with risky situations, such as braking quickly while driving. You should never be a passenger in a car when the driver has been drinking. When possible, you should also try to stop the person from driving or getting into dangerous situations.
4. FALSE. Only time will make you sober. Your liver eliminates alcohol at a certain rate and nothing will change that rate. Your liver needs about 1.5 hours to eliminate one standard drink from your body.

## Is alcohol addictive?

Yes, alcohol can be addictive. About one person in 20 who drinks is dependent on alcohol. People with an addiction may have difficulty stopping by themselves, even if they want to, and even if other negative effects (such as financial or other personal problems) begin to outweigh the positive effects. Alcohol dependence can also cause major problems with friends, family, school, work, emotional and mental health, the law and money!



## How does alcohol make you feel?

Alcohol may slow your reflexes, movement and thinking. For a short time, alcohol can make you feel:

- more calm and relaxed
- more talkative
- less shy
- warm (skin may be flushed)
- less co-ordinated.



- Alcohol can make some people aggressive. For others, drinking can depress them or make them more depressed. When people are intoxicated (drunk), they may:
- have blackouts (lose their memory)
  - slur their speech or have trouble walking
  - feel sleepy or lose consciousness
  - be more likely to have falls and other accidents
  - get alcohol poisoning or die
  - have slower reflexes and thinking
  - take more risks and make bad decisions.



## Can you feel bad when you stop drinking or cut back quickly?

Yes. People who often drink a lot for a period of time, or binge (five or more drinks on one occasion), may feel bad and even experience serious physical effects when they stop drinking or cut down. They may:

- feel nervous and jumpy
- have sleep problems
- have tremors (the "shakes")
- have seizures
- have hallucinations (think they hear or see things that aren't really there).

These are called withdrawal symptoms.



## What is a standard drink?

Each of these drinks contains the same amount of alcohol (a "standard drink" or 13.6 grams of alcohol):



Alcohol is found in different amounts in different kinds of drinks. For example:

- regular strength beer contains five per cent alcohol (some beers contain higher or lower percentages)
- table wine contains about 12 per cent alcohol
- fortified wine contains 16 to 18 per cent alcohol
- most liquor contains 40 per cent alcohol.

An average adult can eliminate from the body (mostly through urine) about two-thirds of one standard drink per hour (10 grams of alcohol). If that person has two standard drinks, it will take about three hours for his or her body to be free of alcohol again. If you get drunk, only time can make you sober again.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

- A shot of whisky has about the same amount of alcohol as a regular bottle of beer.
- High-alcohol drinks, such as coolers and strong beers, will get you drunk much quicker than lower-alcohol drinks, because they contain more alcohol than one standard drink.



## How long do the effects last?

It depends. How quickly you get drunk, and how long it will take you to get sober, depend on:

- how much you drink
- how quickly you drink
- your sex
- how tired you are
- whether or not you have eaten before drinking
- what drugs are in your body
- your body type.

Remember: It's the amount of alcohol you drink that affects you—not the type of drink. It doesn't matter whether you drink beer, coolers, wine or liquor.

## Is alcohol dangerous?

Yes, alcohol can be dangerous in a number of ways. Too much alcohol can cause a hangover (headache, feeling sick, shakiness and vomiting). Too much alcohol can also cause alcohol poisoning and even death.

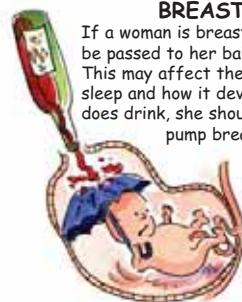
### PREGNANCY

For pregnant women, there is no known safe level of drinking. A woman who drinks during pregnancy is more likely to have a miscarriage, to have the baby born too early, to have the baby born dead, or to have other problems.

A baby may be born with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD). This means the baby may have physical abnormalities, behaviour problems and other difficulties. A woman who is pregnant, or planning to have a baby, should talk to her doctor about alcohol and other drugs.

### BREASTFEEDING

If a woman is breastfeeding, alcohol can be passed to her baby through the milk. This may affect the baby's feeding, its sleep and how it develops. If the mother does drink, she should feed the baby or pump breast milk before she drinks. If you are in this situation, talk to your doctor.



## What are the long-term effects of heavy drinking?

People who drink heavily for a long time have more chance of:

- brain and nerve damage
- high blood pressure and strokes
- liver disease
- damage to the fetus, for pregnant women
- diseases of the stomach, digestive system and pancreas
- breast cancer and throat cancer
- low sex hormone levels
- alcohol dependence.



pancreas

**DID YOU KNOW?**

People who don't drink now shouldn't start drinking to try to get health benefits. They are better off eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly and avoiding smoking.

## Can mixing alcohol with other drugs be dangerous?

Yes. Alcohol and other drugs don't mix. Mixing alcohol with other drugs can even be fatal! If you mix marijuana or club drugs (e.g., ecstasy, ketamine, GHB) with alcohol, it makes it harder to make smart decisions. This means you are more likely to get into dangerous situations, to be injured or to injure someone else.



If you mix alcohol with some medicines—either those prescribed by your doctor or some over-the-counter medicines (like cough and cold medicines, and aspirin)—your body may react violently. You may have cramps or headaches or may vomit. Some combinations can stop your breathing. It is especially dangerous to mix alcohol and other drugs (such as marijuana) with driving.

If you've been drinking alcohol, stimulant drugs (e.g., caffeine, cocaine, amphetamines) can trick you into thinking you're sober—but you're not. You may feel more awake, but really you're still impaired—and you will be until the alcohol leaves your system.

## Is alcohol legal?

Yes, alcohol is a legal drug if you are of legal age. In Ontario you must be at least 19 years old to buy or drink alcohol. The legal drinking age is 19 years throughout Canada, except for Quebec, Manitoba and Alberta. These provinces allow drinking at age 18. In the United States, the drinking age is 21 years.



**DID YOU KNOW?**

In Ontario, you get a harsher penalty if you are convicted of impaired driving more than once:

- First conviction: Licence suspended for one year, plus a \$800 fine
- Second conviction: Licence suspended for three years, plus 14 days in jail
- Third conviction: Licence suspended for 10 years or for life, plus 90 days in jail
- Fourth conviction: No possibility of that person ever having an Ontario driver's licence again, plus he or she must spend another 90 days in jail.

## What is the law about drinking and driving?

In Canada, it is a serious criminal offence to drive with a blood alcohol content (BAC) of .08 per cent or more. It's also illegal to drive while you are impaired, even if your BAC is less than .08 per cent. The same penalties will apply to you if you fail to provide a breath sample when asked by the police. In Ontario, the police will also suspend your driver's licence on the spot for 90 days, separate from any criminal charges you face in court.

Ontario has other drinking and driving laws. If you are caught with a BAC between .05 per cent and .08 per cent, the police can take your licence away on the spot for 12 hours. Also, if you are learning to drive and have a Graduated Driver's Licence, you are not allowed to drive after drinking ANY alcohol.



**DID YOU KNOW?**

According to the law, you may be held responsible for other people's impaired driving. For example, if you have a party where there is alcohol and one of your guests drives away and causes a crash, you could be sued for damages!

## FAST FACTS

About 6,700 Canadians die each year as a result of drinking alcohol—due to car crashes, other accidents, suicides and murders, and health problems related to alcohol use.

