Do you drink?

Some people drink alcohol once in a while. Some are addictive drinkers or alcoholics. “Binge drinking” is a style of drinking you may hear about. It carries a number of risks and negative consequences.

Who drinks?

61% of 16-25 year olds 53% of people 26 and older

What is binge drinking?

Binge drinking can include:

- Drinking a lot in a short amount of time.
- Drinking a lot...period.
- Reaching a very high blood alcohol level.
- Experiencing problems as a result of your drinking.

Binge drinking isn’t just about how many drinks you have, but this is how it is typically defined.

Here’s one definition of binge drinking:

- If you’re a man, consuming 5 or more drinks in a row one or more times in a 2 week period.
- If you’re a woman, consuming 4 or more drinks in a row one or more times in a 2 week period.

This is a helpful estimate. But it doesn’t take into account your weight or the time over which you’re drinking. These variables affect how buzzed or intoxicated a person gets.

What’s wrong with binge drinking?

People who attain high blood alcohol levels face several problems.

- Tolerance
  Tolerance means that over time you have to drink more to get the same buzz you used to get.
  Tolerance is not a good thing:
  - It results in greater health risks.
  - It makes drinking much more expensive.
  - A person has to drink more, which means buying more, to get a buzz.
  - Tolerance can be a warning sign that a person is becoming dependent on alcohol.

- Blackouts
  Ever hear of someone who can’t remember the night before, or can’t remember how he or she got home from a party? This is funny, right? It makes for a good story, right?
  Wrong. This is scary. When a person drinks, alcohol enters the bloodstream through the stomach and small intestine. Then alcohol goes to every organ of the body, including the brain.
  Imagine how much a person’s brain has been affected to have these memory lapses that can last for hours.

- Making Mistakes
  If a person drinks enough, the alcohol in the brain gets in the way of his or her ability to process information.
  People in this state can’t think clearly or use good judgment. The likelihood that they’ll get behind the wheel, go into a stranger’s bedroom, or won’t bother with safer sex increases greatly.

Avoid drinking games. The point of drinking games is to get drunk and to get drunk fast. The same goes for pounding or funneling your drink—it gets you drunk quickly.

Slow down! What’s the rush? Think about drinking for quality, not quantity. Need help slowing down? Space your drinks by alternating with nonalcoholic beverages. Nurse your drink and make it last.

Eat first. With food in your stomach, alcohol gets absorbed more slowly. This will keep you from getting intoxicated as quickly.

Learn more about how alcohol affects you. Check with your health care provider or an alcohol education program to get a blood alcohol chart for a person of your size and gender.

Consider the consequences. Think about the risks of getting drunk, and especially the risks of binge drinking.

Don’t Drink, If...

- You really don’t want to.
- You’re upset, anxious or angry.
- You’re doing other drugs.
- There’s a chance you might need to make a decision about sex.
- You’re pregnant or think you might be.
- You’ll be driving.
- You’re taking certain medicines. Ask your health care provider for guidance about drinking and medications.

Binge drinking increases the risk of:

- alcohol-related injuries or death
- legal problems
- unplanned pregnancy
- transmission of STD, including HIV
- acquaintance rape
What happens when you binge drink?

When a person drinks alcohol fast, blood alcohol level goes up quickly. Here are some examples:

**Women**

A woman who weighs 140 pounds drinks 4 beers over 4 hours. She has a blood alcohol level (BAL) of .064. This is a risky level. Her reaction time is off and her cognitive judgment is beginning to go downhill.

Suppose the same woman drinks 4 beers over 1 hour. She has a blood alcohol level of .112. She is legally drunk, with a clear breakdown of judgment, coordination and significantly impaired reaction time. She may be close to blacking out.

**Men**

A man who weighs 180 pounds drinks 6 beers over 4 hours. He has a blood alcohol level of .061. His reaction time is off and his cognitive judgment is beginning to go downhill.

Suppose the same man drinks the 6 beers over 1 hour. He has a blood alcohol level of .109. He is legally drunk, with a clear breakdown of judgment, coordination and significantly impaired reaction time. He may be close to blacking out.

A higher blood alcohol level means a greater risk of negative consequences.

**What’s a Drink?**

These all have the same amount of alcohol:

- 12-ounce beer
- 10-ounce microbrew
- 4-ounce glass of wine
- 8-ounce malt liquor
- 1¼-ounce shot of 80-proof liquor
- 1-ounce shot of 100-proof liquor

Professional models were used in all photos.
This brochure is not intended as a substitute for your health professional’s opinion or care.
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