

DRUG FACTS

With so many voices and opinions out there, all you need is the knowledge to make your own decisions.

CLASS NOTES ► ALCOHOL

THE LOWDOWN

Alcohol is a depressant that affects every part of your body. The damage it does now can impact the rest of your life.

AKA:

Drink, booze, brew, hooch, moonshine

WHAT IS IT:

Alcohol is a depressant derived from the natural fermentation of fruits, vegetables and grains. These are brewed and distilled into a wide range of beverages with various alcohol contents.

THE RISKS:

You may hear that it will loosen you up and help you relax. What you may not hear is that it can damage the part of your brain that controls coordination, memory, judgment and decision-making.¹ Straight up, drinking makes you dumber—you may slur your words and lose coordination, and your reactions will become slower.

If you drink a lot and drink fast (binge drinking) you really put yourself in danger. With binge drinking, the depressant (or dumbing) effects of alcohol can overwhelm the body's defenses. Unable to move and think clearly, you can do stupid, risky and reckless things that are unsafe, or even lethal. Each year, approximately 5,000 people under the age of 21 die as a result of underage drinking. This includes about 1,900 deaths from car accidents, 1,600 homicides, 300 suicides, and hundreds of other deaths due to accidents like falls, burns and drownings.³

LONG-TERM EFFECTS:

Alcohol travels through your bloodstream and damages your brain, stomach, liver, kidneys and muscles. As a teenager, your body is still developing, so damage done to it now will affect the rest of your life.³ Over time, drinking destroys your body and your looks, so all that work you've done to look good, keep strong and stay fit goes down the drain fast.

THE BOTTOM LINE:

Yes, it's legal for people 21 and older. One reason is that alcohol can have seriously dangerous, long-term impacts on a body and brain that are still developing. Also, statistics show that more teens are killed by alcohol than by all illegal drugs combined.¹

SOURCES

- 1: Administrative Office of the Courts. *Short and Long Term Effects* (<http://www2.courtinfo.ca.gov/stopteendui/teens/resources/substances/alcohol/short-and-long-term-effects.cfm>). Published 2011. Retrieved October 2011.
- 3: U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. *The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking 2007* (<http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/topics/underagedrinking/calltoaction.pdf#page=22>). Published March 2007. Retrieved October 2011.

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PRESSURE METER

The pressure drops when you keep track of the facts.

Teens who abuse alcohol can develop smaller frontal lobes. This part of the brain oversees emotions, personality, motor function, problem solving, spontaneity, memory, language, and more.⁴

Alcohol can shrink the hippocampus, the brain area that helps with learning and memory.⁵

Almost half of people who begin drinking before age 15 eventually become an alcoholic.⁶

Studies show that emergency rooms get over 500 underage drinking-related emergency room visits every day.⁷

The numbers are dropping: over the last 5 years, teen alcohol abuse has been on the way down.⁸

In the U.S. alone, about 5,000 people under age 21 die each year from injuries caused by underage drinking.⁷

SOURCES

- 4: National Institute on Drug Abuse. *Real Teens Ask: Got Alcohol on the Brain?* (<http://teens.drugabuse.gov/blog/real-teens-ask-alcohol-brain/>). Published May 2011. Retrieved July 2011.
- 5: National Institute on Drug Abuse. *Real Teens Ask: Got Alcohol on the Brain?* (<http://teens.drugabuse.gov/blog/tag/alcohol/>). Published May 2011. Retrieved July 2011.
- 6: National Institute on Drug Abuse. *Drugs: Shatter the Myth* (http://drugfactsweek.drugabuse.gov/files/teenbrochure_508.pdf). NIH Publication No. 10-7589. Printed October 2010, Revised April 2011. Retrieved July 2011.
- 7: National Institute on Drug Abuse. *Risky Behavior Leads to Emergency Rooms* (<http://teens.drugabuse.gov/blog/risky-behavior-leads-emergency-rooms>). Retrieved August 2011.
- 8: National Institute on Drug Abuse. *Alcohol Awareness Month: Throw a Party* (<http://teens.drugabuse.gov/blog/alcohol-awareness-month-throw-a-party/>). Published April 2011. Retrieved July 2011.