Alcohol Education Handbook

Information in this manual is provided by Cal Poly Health & Counseling Services
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Alcohol Poisoning: Too Much, Too Fast

Acute Intoxication

Alcohol poisoning, like other drug overdoses, can occur after the ingestion of a large amount of any alcoholic beverage (this includes beer, wine, and distilled spirits). But inexperienced drinkers, or those more sensitive to alcohol, may become acutely intoxicated and suffer serious consequences after drinking smaller amounts. Because of differences in body chemistry, women can overdose after drinking lesser amounts than men.

Here's what happens. Alcohol (a depressant drug), once ingested, works to slow down some of the body's functions. This includes heart rate, breathing, and blood pressure. When the vital centers have been depressed enough by alcohol, unconsciousness occurs. Further, the amount of alcohol that it takes to produce unconsciousness is dangerously close to the fatal dose. People who survive alcohol poisoning sometimes suffer irreversible brain damage. Many students are surprised to learn that death can occur from acute intoxication. Most think the worst that can happen is that they will pass out or have a hangover the next day.

Knowing

Knowing the signs and symptoms of acute alcohol intoxication and the proper action to take can help you avoid a tragedy.

A Dead Giveaway

Binge drinking (drinking five or more drinks in a row on a single occasion) is a common phenomenon on college campuses. As a result, you may come into contact with a person who is experiencing a life threatening acute alcohol intoxication episode.

But how can you tell if someone is about to become a victim of alcohol poisoning? And if they are, what can you do to help?
Alcohol Poisoning: A Medical Emergency

Signs and Symptoms

- Unconsciousness or semi-consciousness
- Slow respiration (eight or less breaths per minute)
- Cold, clammy, pale, or bluish skin
- Strong odor of alcohol
- While these are obvious signs of alcohol poisoning, the list is certainly not all inclusive

Appropriate Action

- If you encounter someone with one or more of the above symptoms, call 911 immediately
- While waiting for the emergency transport, gently turn the intoxicated person on his or her side and maintain that position by placing a pillow in the small of the person's back. This is important to prevent aspiration (choking) should the person vomit.
- Stay with the person until medical help arrives.

“Sleeping it Off”

A more difficult situation occurs when the person appears to be "sleeping it off." It is important to understand that even though a person may be semi-conscious, alcohol already in the stomach may continue to enter the bloodstream and circulate throughout the body. The person's life may still be in danger.

If you should encounter such a situation, place the person on his or her side, help them maintain that position, and watch them closely for signs of alcohol poisoning. If any signs appear, call 911.

If you are having difficulty determining whether an individual is acutely intoxicated, contact a health professional immediately - you cannot afford to guess.
Blood Alcohol Level

Blood Alcohol Level is the amount of alcohol present in your blood as you drink. It is calculated by determining how many milligrams of alcohol are present in 100 milliliters of blood. But you don't need a Breathalyzer, a calculator or a measurement conversion chart to figure out what blood alcohol level you had last night - just use the table below. This is a generalized chart based on a person who is metabolizing one drink an hour.

*Remember:* While these chart is a good general guideline, every individual reacts differently to alcohol. The chart does not take into account your individual body composition, your use of medications, your mood changes, or your personal metabolism rate. Therefore, your blood alcohol level may in fact be higher or lower than the chart indicates. Just keep in mind that your body processes alcohol at a constant rate of .5 ounces per hour, regardless of how many ounces you consume. Therefore, the faster you drink, the higher your blood alcohol level with be.

If you are a **WOMAN**, your Blood Alcohol Content is:

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**Did You Know?**

- .08-.10 blood alcohol level is considered legally drunk
- Most states practice zero-tolerance laws: if you are under age 21, any alcohol in your system is against the law
Blood Alcohol Level and Your Behavior

.02%-0.03%
You feel mildly relaxed and maybe a little lightheaded. Your inhibitions are slightly loosened, and whatever mood you were in before you started drinking may be mildly intensified.

.05%-0.06%
You feel warm and relaxed. Your behavior may become exaggerated, making you talk faster and louder. You may also act bolder than usual. Emotions are intensified, so your good moods are better and your bad moods are worse. You may also feel a mild sense of euphoria.

.08%-0.09%
You believe you are functioning better than you actually are. You may start to slur your speech, your sense of balance is off, and your motor skills are starting to become impaired. Your ability to see and hear clearly is diminished. Your judgment is also being affected, so it is difficult to decide whether or not to continue drinking.

.10%-0.12%
At this point, you feel euphoric, but you lack coordination and balance. Your motor skills are markedly impaired, as are your judgment and memory. You probably don't remember how many drinks you've had. Your emotions are exaggerated, and some people become loud, aggressive, or belligerent. If you are a guy, you may have trouble getting an erection with your blood alcohol level this high.

.20%
You feel confused, dazed, or otherwise disoriented. You need help to stand up or walk. If you hurt yourself at this point, you probably won't realize it because you won't feel pain. At this point, you may experience nausea and/or start vomiting (for some people, a lower blood alcohol level may cause vomiting). Since blackouts are likely at this point, you may not remember any of this.

.25%
All mental, physical, and sensory functions are severely impaired. You are emotionally numb. There is an increased risk of asphyxiation from choking on vomit and of seriously injuring yourself.

.30%
You are in a stupor. You have little comprehension of where you are. With an alarming blood alcohol level such as this, your body will decide to "pass out" for you.

.35%
This blood alcohol level also happens to be the level of surgical anesthesia. You may stop breathing at this point.

.40%
You are probably in a coma. The nerve centers controlling your heart beat and respiration rate are slowing down. It's a miracle if you're not dead.
**Booze Truths**

1. **Alcohol is toxic to the human body. TRUE:** There is a limit to the amount of alcohol the human body can tolerate. When you drink too much, your blood alcohol level can rise to a point where it actually becomes poisonous.

2. **Devouring a burger after drinking all night will help you sober up. FALSE:** The liver can break down alcohol at a rate of about .5 ounces per hour. This is only half the amount that is present in a standard drink. Once alcohol is in your bloodstream, nothing can speed this rate of metabolism. Not caffeine. Not food. Not water. You might be full, but you won't be any less drunk.

3. **Alcohol, food, and non-alcoholic beverages are all digested the same way. FALSE:** Alcohol is not digested like other foods or beverages. It passes directly into the bloodstream through the tissue that lines the stomach and small intestines.

4. **Taking a nap helps you sober up. FALSE:** Sleeping does not increase the rate at which your body can metabolize alcohol. It will still be processed at .5 ounces per hour, even while you snooze. So it is possible to wake up and still be drunk.

5. **Alcohol doesn't affect your body's organs unless you get really drunk. FALSE:** When you have an empty stomach, alcohol is absorbed into the bloodstream in about five minutes. As soon as alcohol is in your bloodstream, it only takes about 90 seconds for it to be carried to all of the body's organs, including the brain.

6. **You can suffer alcohol withdrawal symptoms after your first drink. TRUE:** Alcohol, like other drugs, has withdrawal symptoms. The common hangover has symptoms like nausea, headache, dehydration, and the shakes.

7. **As long as you have gotten a few hours of sleep, you'll be fine to drive the morning after you've been drinking. FALSE:** You motor coordination can be affected for up to ten hours after you finish your last drink. So before you get in the car to drive home, think twice about your ability to drive safely.

8. **Passing out can be life threatening. TRUE:** If you drink so much that you pass out, it is because the alcohol has caused your brain to start shutting down, resulting in your loss of consciousness. The amount of alcohol it takes to pass out is dangerously close to the amount of alcohol it takes to kill you.

9. **Getting drunk will help you perform better sexually. FALSE:** While alcohol consumption may loosen your sexual inhibitions, heavy alcohol consumption can cause impotence in men and decreased vaginal or clitoral sensations in women.
10. Even though alcohol is a drug, you can't overdose on it. **FALSE**: A dangerously high blood alcohol level can cause your heartbeat and breathing to stop altogether, which mean you can die from drinking too much.

11. Your family history can influence your drinking habits. **TRUE**: Children of alcoholics are three to four times more likely to become alcoholics themselves.

12. Every time you drink alcohol, you kill 10,000 brain cells. **FALSE**: Not exactly. It is unlikely that a single drink will kill brain cells. However, long-term, chronic drinking can cause permanent memory loss and brain damage.
Sobering Statistics

Here are a few sobering statistics on how drinking too much, too often can put a serious damper on your dreams of achieving academic glory--or even your dreams of just graduating:

- According to the Core Institute, an organization that surveys college drinking practices, **300,000 of today's college students will eventually die of alcohol-related causes** such as drunk driving accidents, cirrhosis of the liver, various cancers and heart disease.
- **159,000 of today's first-year college students will drop out of school next year for alcohol- or other drug-related reasons.** The average student spends about $900 on alcohol each year.
- **Almost one-third of college students admit to having missed at least one class because of their alcohol or drug use,** and nearly one-quarter of students report bombing a test or project because of the aftereffects of drinking or doing drugs.
- **One night of heavy drinking can impair your ability to think abstractly for up to 30 days,** limiting your ability to relate textbook reading to what your professor says, or to think through a football play.

Here are some stone-cold sobering statistics about the college sex-and-alcohol cocktail:

- **As many as 70% of college students admit to having engaged in sexual activity primarily as a result of being under the influence of alcohol, or to having sex they wouldn't have had if they had been sober.**
- **90% of all campus rapes occur when alcohol has been used** by either the assailant or the victim.
- At least **one out of five college students abandons safe sex practices** when they're drunk, even if they do protect themselves when they're sober.
- **One in twelve college males** admit to having committed acts that meet the legal definition of rape or acquaintance rape.
- **55% of female students and 75% of male students** involved in acquaintance rape admit to having been drinking or using drugs when the incident occurred.
- **60% of college women who are infected with STDs,** including genital herpes and AIDS, report that they were under the influence of alcohol at the time they had intercourse with the infected person.
- **Female college freshman are at the highest risk for sexual assault** between the first day of school and Thanksgiving break.
- According to the Center for Disease Control, **1 in 1500 college students is HIV positive,** and the fastest-growing populations of American people infected with HIV are teenagers and young adults.
8 College Drinking Myths Busted Wide Open

Myth 1: "I'm more fun when I drink."
REALITY: Believe us, no one thinks you're fun when you're slurring, stumbling all over the place, puking in your pillow, or keeping your roommates up all night. There is a big difference between laughing with someone and laughing at someone. Do you really want to be someone's entertainment?

Myth 2: "Everyone drinks heavily at parties so they can relax and hang out."
REALITY: Though many people use alcohol to help loosen them up in social situations, if you’d stop drinking for a sec to take a closer look, you'd realize that most people are not drinking heavily. There are only a few people who really get trashed at parties, lose control, embarrass themselves, or endanger their lives.

Myth 3: "It totally mellows me out to smoke a little weed after I throw back a few beers."
REALITY: Mixing drugs (including drugs like alcohol and marijuana) has what scientists call an additive effect. This means you'll feel the intoxication from both. So don't kid yourself into thinking you'll have a few drinks and then mellow out by smoking pot. Sure, you may feel mellow, but what you really are is wasted.

Myth 4: "It's no one else's business how much I drink. I can handle it."
REALITY: If you're drunk and then lose your keys and then have to pound on the door until your roommate wakes up to let you in, that affects your roommate. In fact, studies show that one person's drinking habits can affect an average of five people other than the drinker. Still think it's nobody else's business?

Myth 5: "If I don't drink, there would be nothing to do at my school."
REALITY: Uh, hello? It's called a college handbook. Maybe you stuck yours under your bed after the first week of school. Find it, read it, and learn about the clubs, sports, and service organizations your school offers. You may be surprised to find out how many people are involved in extracurricular activities other than the Drinking Team. Still not convinced? The Peer Health Education Center has a list of 101 things to do in San Luis Obispo without drugs or alcohol. You should check it out.

Myth 6: "I'm having as much fun as I can while I'm in college. As soon as I graduate I'll get my act together."
REALITY: Your drinking habits can keep you from attending class, studying regularly, or getting involved in a career-oriented club or internship. Plus, if you're thinking of going to grad school, you still need to be making the grade so that your transcripts look good. One other thing to keep in mind: Even though no one goes to college intending to become an alcoholic, heavy drinking behavior in college can ultimately lead some people to full-blown alcoholism after college.
**Myth 7:** "Even though my mom or dad is an alcoholic, I know how to drink without letting it get out of hand."
**REALITY:** Maybe, maybe not. Children who grow up in homes with parental alcoholism are three to four times more likely to become alcoholics themselves. Though this does not mean you'll definitely have an alcohol problem if one of your parents does, it does mean you should pay special attention to your behavior. You are not like people whose parents are not alcoholics.

**Myth 8:** "I just drink socially."
**REALITY:** Drinking with other people does not make you a social drinker. Social drinkers might drink regularly, but they don't get drunk. Nor does a social drinker exhibit any of the clinical signs of addiction to alcohol. Visit the self-assessment portion of this website to find out if partying plays too big a part in your life.
Mastering Moderation: How to Drink Responsibly

If you are a drinker and want to avoid hangover, learn to drink responsibly. That means not drinking to escape (people or problems) and not drinking to get drunk. But that's only want it doesn't mean. What is does mean is learning to see alcohol for what it is (a drug) and remembering to approach it with the healthy dose of caution it deserves.

- Eat before drinking
- Drink slowly
- Space your drinks
- Set a drinking limit
- Easy Does It

So what's the answer? Don't drink? That's sensible enough advice, but it's probably not for everyone. Still, there are precautions that will help check the odds of a hangover. On involves slowing down the absorption of alcohol in the body by eating before you drink (and even while you are drinking) and by sipping your drinks slowly. The safest bet of all is to practice moderation when drinking.

Moderation is healthy and painless. Drink enjoyably, but as part of the social event, not the goal. Think about it. Because of all the medications, preparations and potions touted as remedies for hangovers through the ages, the only sure-fire way to spell relief the morning after the night before is (and always has been): M-O-D-E-R-A-T-I-O-N. Cheers.

Not Drinking

It can be tough to socialize with people when they're getting wasted and you're not. Sometimes, you may have to go home early to get away from heavily drinking partygoers, or stay away from the bash altogether. But if you are in the mood to hang out, here's what to do so you don't feel pressured to get plastered. Obviously, the simplest thing to do is to tell anyone who cares to ask that you aren't drinking. However, if you can't handle that, be as creative as you want to be with excuses. Here are some alternatives:

"No thanks. The last time I did shots I puked up colors you've never even seen before."
"I'd love to, but I have a bet with someone to see how long I can go without drinking."
"I don't drink."
"I'm taking the night off."
Hangover Clues: The Day After

A hangover is caused partly by body's being poisoned by alcohol and partly by the body's reaction to withdrawal from alcohol.

**Alcohol robs your brain cells** of water and glucose (the brain's food), which is why you experience hangover symptoms such as headache, dehydration, and the shakes the day after a night of heavy drinking.

**Although eating will not help you to sober up while you're drunk, eating while you drink or before you go to sleep after drinking can lessen the intensity of the next day's hangover.** That's because when you eat, your stomach holds the food for digestion, closing its contents off from the small intestine. Alcohol is absorbed into the body most quickly from the small intestine, so if the alcohol cannot reach the small intestine, it cannot be absorbed that way. (Though it will still be absorbed through the stomach, it will take longer, thereby allowing the liver to break down the alcohol that's already in the bloodstream.) Giving the alcohol time to be metabolized is what will lessen your hungover feeling.

**Remember NEVER to take acetaminophen (the medicine found in Tylenol”) before you go to bed.** It's metabolized by the liver just like alcohol is, and combining them can cause serious liver damage. Ibuprofen and other anti-inflammatories are not as threatening to the liver, but using them to excess could cause gastric problems. Among the most threatening combinations are alcohol and codeine (which is found in many cough medicines), barbiturates, and tranquilizers. All are depressants; mixed together, they can slow down breathing and cause confusion and sedation. To be safe, wait until alcohol has cleared your system before taking any medication for your hangover headache.

Though there are lots of so-called "hangover cures," **the only real cure is time.** The best things to do the day after heavy drinking are down lots of water and try to rest if possible.

**One last thing:** while you're feeling like crap, make a mental note of how awful it is. Then the next time you have an opportunity to drink heavily, you might think twice.
How to Help a Friend

There are two kinds of intervention. One is less formal, though it will nevertheless take a strong commitment on your part. If you have a friend who might have a problem with alcohol, and you feel you can help him or her on your own, then follow our six-step plan.

STEP 1: Get sound advice. Go to a school counselor, a campus nurse, or someone else you trust. You don't have to name any names, if you explain your predicament to a third party, it will help you figure out how to proceed.

STEP 2: Get sobriety on your side. When it's time to confront your friend, make sure he or she isn't drunk. It's going to be hard enough to convince your friend that he or she needs help, and you've already seen that it's impossible to reason with a drunk person. The time will never feel "right" to bring up such a tough subject; but beginning your talk when you're both alert will give you a better chance of being heard.

STEP 3: Drum up your willpower. Realize that this is not going to be easy. Before you speak to your friend, have a definite plan for how you'll start helping them. Find out about A.A. meetings or other substance abuse counseling that's available, and plan to accompany your friend to at least a few meetings. All recovering addicts need the support of people who love them in order to successfully battle their problem. If you decide you want to work through it with him or her, make sure you've got the strength to stick it out. You might consider attending a support group such as AlAnon to work through your own feelings as you help your friend through the recovery process.

STEP 4: Keep it personal. Begin the conversation with your friend by letting him or her know you care, and that's why you're going to be straight. Use your own feelings about the situation--"The way you act when you're drinking makes me worry about you"--instead of, "So-and-so said you got sloppy drunk and insulted her." Be up front and list the negative effects you've seen alcohol have on the person, including alcohol-related health problems, memory loss, poor grades, isolation from family and friends, etc. Your friend won't be able to ignore the hard evidence.

STEP 5: Expect denial. It won't be easy getting your friend to admit he or she's got a problem with alcohol. Accepting that you've developed a dependency on alcohol can be humiliating and shameful. So do what you can to reassure his or her dignity: Remind your friend that this dependency is the one personal obstacle that he or she has to overcome, and that there are many great things that make your friend a valuable human being. The first talk you have with your friend about this problem probably won't be the last. But don't give up.

STEP 6: Follow through. Ultimately, it must be your friend's choice to help him- or herself. Once that decision is made, show your support: Prove that you meant it when you said you'd attend A.A. meetings with him, or that you'd opt for going to the movies with her instead of hitting that 10-keg victory party. Knowing you're there to lean on during moments of weakness when he or she really, really wants a drink--and to celebrate his or her one-month, two-month, six-month anniversary of being dry--will help set your friend on the path to recovery. For your part, you need to have patience and remind yourself you're being a true and good friend.
The other kind of intervention involves thorough training with a professional, where a team develops a strategy for confronting a substance abuser. If the person you need to confront has a history of...

- abusive, violent or unpredictable behavior
- mental illness, suicidal threats, or attempted suicide
- chronic depression
- numerous failed attempts at sobriety

...it is strongly recommended that you get professional help in devising an intervention plan before you confront your friend.
Where to Find Support

Enlist the help of family and friends. When they hear that you want to try to curb your drinking, they'll be happy to do whatever they can to help and encourage you.

Check out college literature like your student handbook or orientation packet, and find out what support groups are offered on campus.

- Call 800-DRUGHELP, 24 hours, seven days a week for confidential answers to your questions or information about help in your community.
- Visit Peer Health Education, located on the bottom level of the Health Center.
- Look in the yellow pages under mental health, community services, social and human services, alcoholism, or drug abuse. You may be surprised to learn how many organizations there are, including Alcoholics Anonymous, that can help.
- Visit the Additional Links portion of this website to find out more about the effects and dangers of alcohol.
Date Rape Drugs

Protect Yourself

Here are some tactics to use to avoid getting involved in a dangerous sexual situation:

- Avoid drinking too much. Alcohol impairs your ability to make smart choices.
- Talk to your date beforehand to make sure you are on the same page about where the night is going.
- Don't go back to someone's room or leave a party with someone you don't know well.
- Trust your gut. If you feel at all uncomfortable, get out of the situation.
- When going on a date with someone new, make sure to tell a friend what your plans are so that someone knows where you will be.
- Take a self defense class. That way, you will know what to do if things get too physical.
Date Rape Drugs: What You Need to Know

You've heard about them on the news - young women being sexually assaulted after drugs have been slipped into their drinks. What exactly are "Roofies" and GHB? And how can you protect yourself?

What are they?

Rohypnol, known on the street as "Roofies," and Gamma hydroxy butyric acid, known as GHB or liquid ecstasy, are depressants that can cause dizziness, disorientation, loss of inhibitions, memory blackouts, and loss of consciousness when mixed with alcohol. Both are odorless, colorless, and tasteless, so you may not even realize it if someone slips one of these substances into your drink. Because they may cause you to pass out, ingesting them may put you at risk for sexual assault.

How can you protect yourself?

- Don't put your drink down. If your drink is out of sight, even for a few minutes, don't finish it. Get yourself a new one.
- Don't accept an open drink from anyone. If you order a drink in a bar, make sure you watch the bartender open the bottle or mix your drink.
- Avoid punch bowls. With Roofies and GHB in circulation, you can't be sure what's in the punch, so think twice before you partake.
- Make a pact with your friends to watch out for each other, and spread the word about these "date rape drugs" to everyone you know.

Rapists have a new weapon. Dosing drinks with date rape drugs like Roofies and GHB can take away your ability to fight back and your memory of what was done to you. When these drugs are mixed with alcohol, the results can be lethal.

If you think you may have been given Roofies or GHB, immediately go to the emergency room and ask for a urine screening test. Though traces of the drug may still appear up to 72 hours after ingestion (depending on dosage, and individual metabolism) the chances of getting proof are best when the sample is obtained quickly. Therefore, in the event that you are sexually assaulted after you were unknowingly given one of these drugs, the results of this test could provide incriminating evidence against your attacker.

Whether you feel you might have a problem with alcohol and want to cut back, or you want to know how to keep your drinking under control, use these guidelines:

**DO** formulate a mission statement. Why is is you want to cut down or stop your drinking? Whether it's to help you lose the freshman 15, to feel healthier in general, or to stop getting into fights with your family, write down your reason(s). It sounds corny, but it'll make you take the challenge more seriously.
**DON'T** go out with people who make you feel uncomfortable if you're not drinking. If you ever feel as though you could be easily persuaded to drink, make alternative plans with friends who are less inclined to include alcohol in their fun.

**DO** set a liquor limit. Telling yourself you will not drink during the week, or that you'll have no more than one drink a day, will get your mind set not to exceed your maximum.

**DON'T** guzzle. When you are drinking, take hour-long breaks between drinks. Drinking faster than your body can feel the effects can get you into real trouble. Avoid drinking games, you'll end up drinking more alcohol, more quickly than your body can handle.

**DO** alternate alcoholic beverages with non-alcoholic drinks, like soda or juice.

**DON'T** keep beer, wine, or hard liquor at home. It will be easier to resist if it is simply not there.

**DO** take a vacation from drinking. Notice how good you feel, physically and emotionally, during that time. If you don't start to feel better, you may have a problem with alcohol.

**DO** save the cash you don't waste getting wasted. Whenever you refuse an alcoholic beverage, put the amount of money you saved in a jar. You can put your dollars toward spring break, dinner with friends, or that new jacket you've been eyeing but thought you couldn't afford.

**DO** eat before you start consuming any alcohol, and continue to munch while you drink. Eating while you drink slows down how quickly you get drunk.

**DON'T** go to places where you'll be bored if you're not drinking or where you'll feel socially uneasy if you don't have a drink in your hand.

**DO** keep a drinking diary. Write down how many drinks you consume over a month-long period and how much it costs you. When you realize how much dough you are sinking on drinking, it might give you incentive to cut down your alcohol intake even further.