Health Facts: Alcohol Abuse

Introduction

Alcohol abuse is a form of drug abuse and is one of the largest causes of Navy fatalities. Although efforts are being made to de-glamorize the use of alcohol in the Service, problems still remain. The age group most prone to alcohol related incidents is the late teens/ early twenties. Alcoholic beverages will always be a part of holiday and special occasion celebrations. However, people are becoming more aware of drunk-driving aspects of alcohol abuse. Unfortunately, drinking to excess is still a key problem and recently, the Navy and Marine Corps have lost several people from acute alcohol poisoning.

In our country:

- There are 4 million alcoholics and there are 6 million problem drinkers.
- Alcohol contributes to 20,000 traffic deaths a year.
- Alcohol contributes to HALF of all arrests. Alcohol contributes to 25,000 murders or suicides
- Alcohol costs the economy $60 billion in lost work, medical/hospital bills, property damage and welfare cases.

What happens to the body when you drink?

Alcohol combines the effects of a depressant—a drug that slows down the nervous system, and a diuretic---a drug that increases the need to urinate. Alcohol begins to be absorbed in the bloodstream through the stomach lining. The rate of this absorption depends on the amount of food in the stomach. If too much alcohol enters the stomach, it secretes a mucous coating to slow down the absorption and shuts off flow to the lower intestine. This event may cause nausea. In a healthy person, vomiting is a natural response to too much alcohol. Absorption is continued in the small intestine. Water does not dilute the effects of alcohol it actually SPEEDS up absorption!

About 90% of the alcohol is metabolized--converted to energy. The remaining 10% is lost through sweating, urination and exhalation. For the average person, drinking four ounces of whiskey will result in a blood alcohol content (BAC) of at least 0.07% and yields about 1 1/2 ounces of straight alcohol. Note that "average" is based mainly on body weight and not tolerance for alcohol. The average person processes alcohol at a rate of 1/3 to 1/2 ounce per hour.

The blood alcohol content breakdown of the short-term effects for the average person: 0.05%--Impaired judgment, 0.10%--Clear signs of intoxication (slurred speech, inability to walk straight, etcetera), 0.30%--confusion/unconsciousness, 0.45%--Coma, 0.70%--Brain stem affected--heart and lungs stop—DEATH.

What are the guidelines for adults in alcohol consumption?

If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation. Women should drink no more than one per day and Men no more than two a day. This limit is based on differences between the sexes in both weight and metabolism.

So what counts as "a drink"?

- 12 ounces of regular beer (150 calories)
- 5 ounces of wine (100 calories)
- 1.5 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits (100 calories)

What are the health risks?

Alcoholic beverages supply calories but very *few* nutrients. Alcoholic beverages are harmful when consumed in excess, and some people should not drink at all. Excess alcohol alters judgment and can lead to dependency and a great many other serious health problems. Taking more than one drink per day for women or two drinks per day for men can raise the risk for motor vehicle crashes, other injuries, high blood pressure, stroke, violence, suicide and certain types of cancer. Even one drink per day can slightly raise the risk of breast cancer. Too much alcohol may cause social and psychological problems, cirrhosis of the liver, inflammation of the pancreas, and damage to the brain and heart.
Heavy drinkers also are at risk of malnutrition because alcohol contains empty calories that may substitute for those in nutritious foods. If adults choose to drink alcoholic beverages, they should consume them only in moderation and with meals to slow alcohol absorption.

What is the Navy doing to prevent alcohol misuse?

In 2013, the Navy launched a new campaign to encourage responsible drinking among Sailors by celebrating the achievements in their Navy careers. The campaign is entitled Keep What You've Earned and the mission is to protect Sailors and increase Force readiness by creating a responsible drinking environment in the Navy.

To learn more alcohol please visit Navy Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention at:

http://www.public.navy.mil/BUPERS-NPC/SUPPORT/21ST_CENTURY_SAILOR/NADAP/Pages/default2.aspx

To learn more about Keep What You've Earned or to get materials/resources for the campaign please visit:
http://www.public.navy.mil/bupers-npc/support/21st_Century_Sailor/nadap/campaign_events/drinkresponsibly/Pages/default.aspx

For more information on this and other health and wellness topics, visit the
Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center (NMCPHC) website:
http://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/health-promotion/Pages/default.aspx