



## The Truth About Alcohol

Sometimes there can be a lot of pressure to drink when you are socializing. You may find yourself at a party where everyone is playing drinking games or at a bar with your friends who are buying you rounds of drinks to celebrate your return from deployment. While there is nothing wrong with choosing to drink alcohol, it's important to drink responsibly because irresponsible alcohol consumption can quickly lead to problems. How do you know if you have taken it too far? You may lose track of time and suddenly six hours have passed, you are unable to remember parts of the evening, or realize you drank more than you intended to when the night started.

Most Sailors who choose to drink do so responsibly, but it is probably a good idea to check in with yourself and your shipmates every now and then and make sure your drinking habits are not affecting your work or your loved ones. You may think your drinking habits are normal, but sometimes it is hard to spot warning signs of a drinking problem. Common myths surrounding alcohol use can contribute to the challenge of recognizing a problem.

### Time to face the facts

Do you think you have all of the facts about alcohol? Here is the truth behind some of the common risks surrounding alcohol use:

- **Myth:** Being able to “hold your liquor” is something to brag about and means you do not have to worry as much about excessive drinking.  
**Fact:** Individuals who require larger amounts of alcohol to feel the effects may be at a higher risk for alcoholism because they tend to drink more and develop a tolerance. Some individuals develop a metabolic tolerance; their blood alcohol concentration (BAC) does not rise to as high a level and the alcohol is eliminated more rapidly, however, this is very harmful to the liver. Others experience a decreased sensitivity to alcohol where they do not feel as intoxicated although their BAC continues to rise. This means that although they may be legally impaired, they will not feel drunk.<sup>1</sup>
- **Myth:** It is not a big deal to drink when you are underage.  
**Fact:** Underage drinking is illegal and the consequences include fines, jail time and/or community service. Plus, individuals who drink underage are more likely to experience social and legal problems, physical and sexual assaults, and are at a higher risk for suicide and homicide.<sup>2</sup>



- **Myth:** Drinking coffee, taking a cold shower and eating carbohydrates will help you “sober up.”  
**Fact:** You cannot change the rate at which your body burns alcohol. The liver typically takes approximately one hour to process the amount of alcohol in a standard drink.<sup>1</sup> Drinking coffee or taking a cold shower may make you feel less intoxicated, which can lead to bad decision making such as driving a vehicle.
- **Myth:** Alcohol problems are “all or nothing” – you either do not have a problem with alcohol or you are an alcoholic.  
**Fact:** Alcoholism is not defined by *what* you drink, *when* you drink it, or even *how much* you drink. It’s the *effects* of your drinking that define a problem.<sup>3</sup> Alcoholism is characterized by the inability to limit one’s drinking, and continued use of alcohol in spite of the physical, psychological and relationship problems it may cause.<sup>4</sup> Not all heavy drinkers cope with alcoholism, however, individuals who are heavy drinkers but do not have alcoholism are at higher risk for developing alcoholism later in life, as well as chronic medical conditions such as liver or heart disease.<sup>5</sup>

### How do you know if you or someone you know has a problem with alcohol?

If a service member chooses to drink, they can preserve their reputation, career, relationships and health by choosing to drink responsibly. Not drinking responsibly can indicate a problem with alcohol. Some of the signs of a drinking problem include: drinking more than intended; having memory blackouts when drinking; and problems with family, friends or the law caused by drinking.

### Where to turn for help

Recognizing that you have a problem with alcohol is the first step in recovery. Reaching out for help takes strength and courage, and it could save your health and your career. By getting help early, service members can address their drinking habits before they result in serious consequences.

According to the Navy Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention (NADAP) office, self-referral is the best option for seeking help, but if you suspect that someone you know has an issue with alcohol, the Navy encourages you to seek help for them as well. When Sailors get help via self-referral or through the assistance of their command, neither results in any disciplinary action.

A self-referral is initiated by a Sailor who desires counseling or treatment for alcohol abuse. To qualify as a valid self-referral, there can be no credible evidence that an alcohol-related incident has already occurred (for example, you cannot initiate a self-referral after you have been cited



for an alcohol-related offense to avoid disciplinary action). Additionally, a self-referral disclosure of alcohol abuse must be made to a qualified referral agent with the intent of acquiring treatment. Disclosure made to any other person who is not a qualified self-referral agent may not prevent disciplinary action. Qualified self-referral agents include:

- Drug and Alcohol Program Advisors
- Commanding officers, XO's, OICs, or CMDCMs/Chiefs of the Boat (COB)
- Navy drug and alcohol counselors (or interns)
- Department of Defense medical personnel
- Chaplains
- Fleet and Family Support Center counselors

If you do not want to use the self-referral process encouraged by the Navy, then it is important to understand your other options. Talking to an alcohol and drug control officer (ADCO) may help you decide the best route to take. Regardless, the Navy will support you in your effort to lead a healthier life. Similarly, the Navy reminds all personnel that if a friend or shipmate needs help controlling their drinking, do not wait until they hit rock bottom. Reach out and talk to them about your concerns.

### Additional resources

For more information on responsible alcohol use and where to seek help if you or someone you know needs it, visit the following resources:

- Navy's "[Keep What You've Earned](#)" campaign
- Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center's [Preventing Drug Abuse and Excessive Alcohol Use](#) campaign
- [Live to Play, Play to Live](#) 2013 campaign

1. University Health Services Health Promotion Office. Tolerance and beyond. University of Rochester. <http://www.rochester.edu/uhs/healthtopics/Alcohol/tolerance.html>. Published 26 May 2011. Accessed 21 May 2013.
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Alcohol and public health: Underage drinking. <http://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/underage-drinking.htm>. Published 29 Oct 2012. Accessed 31 May 2013.
3. Navy Personnel Command. Navy Alcohol and Drug Abuse and Prevention (OPNAV 135F).
4. Center for Disease Control. Alcohol and public health: Frequently asked questions. <http://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/faqs.htm#alcoholismAbuse>. Last updated 7 November 2012. Accessed 21 May 2013.
5. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Rethinking Drinking: Alcohol and your health. <http://rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/QuestionsAnswers/default.asp>. Accessed 7 May 2013.