



Excessive Use of Alcohol

Many people enjoy a drink or two, especially when socializing with friends and family, but drinking too much or too often can lead to dangerous consequences. Alcohol is the fourth leading preventable cause of death in the United States, killing around 88,000 people each year.¹ Alcohol use can lead to injuries, health problems, birth defects, and other consequences when used in excess.² Excessive alcohol use includes one or more of the following²:

- Heavy drinking, typically defined as 15 or more drinks (see below for what counts as a drink) per week for men and eight or more drinks per week for women
- Binge drinking, typically defined as five or more drinks on a single occasion for men, and four or more drinks on a single occasion for women
- Underage drinking
- Drinking while pregnant

How to avoid heavy or binge drinking

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), about 23.4 percent of adults had at least one heavy drinking day in the past year.³ Binge drinking and heavy drinking can be avoided by understanding how much alcohol your drink contains, how much is considered “healthy” for you, and also by listening to your own body when consuming alcohol. One standard drink is defined as²:

- 12-ounces of beer (5% alcohol content)
- 8-ounces of malt liquor (7% alcohol content)
- 5-ounces of wine (12% alcohol content)
- 1.5-ounces of 80-proof (40% alcohol content) distilled spirits or liquor (e.g., gin, rum, vodka, whiskey)

When choosing a drink, consider the following limits provided by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism⁴:

- Low risk drinking limits for women: no more than 3 drinks on any single day and no more than 7 drinks per week
- Low risk drinking limits for men: no more than 4 drinks on any single day and no more than 14 drinks per week



These are recommended limits; however, it is extremely important to consider other factor such as your weight, height, how much food you have consumed, medications you are taking, and health status.

What is the Harm?

Frequent heavy drinking has been linked to several risks to one's personal life, physical and mental health, injury, and death.⁴ Alcohol has been a factor in about 50 percent of severe trauma injuries and sexual assaults, and 40 percent of fatal motor vehicle crashes, suicides, and fatal falls.⁴ Health risks associated with heavy alcohol consumption include: heart disease, liver disease, sleep disorders, depression, stroke, bleeding from the stomach, various types of cancer, and more. It is important to remember that consuming any amount of alcohol can alter your judgment and function. Alcohol enters your bloodstream immediately and the effects can appear as soon as 10 minutes after your first sip.⁵ As your blood alcohol concentration (BAC) level increases with the more alcohol you consume, one can experience reduced inhibitions, slurred speech and confusion, difficulty breathing, and memory loss. See below for tips on how to practice safe and responsible drinking every time.

Tips for safe and low risk drinking

The majority of Navy Reservists (90 percent) reported heavy drinking never or on only one or two occasions per year compared to 81 percent active duty Sailors.⁶ Active duty Marines and Marine Reservists, however, reported heavy drinking never or on only one or two occasions per year at 73 percent and 75 percent respectively.⁶ Follow the tips below for responsible drinking every time:

- Plan ahead for a safe ride home before you start drinking. Take a taxi or ride with someone who has not been drinking. Never drink and drive.
- Don't try to keep up with others.
- Don't drink on an empty stomach.
- Alternate alcoholic drinks with non-alcoholic drinks such as water.
- Know your limit, before you get there.



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References

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