



ALCOHOL USE: A FACT SHEET FOR PARENTS

As parents or guardians of teenagers, what should you know about alcohol use?

- Alcohol is the drug most often used and abused by teenagers.
- Alcohol use includes beer, wine, wine coolers, hard liquor, and mixed drinks.
- Alcohol is a toxic chemical.
- Binge drinking for women is having more than three drinks per occasion.
- Drinking games, competitions, and bets are especially dangerous.
- Alcohol abuse is drinking too often or too much despite negative consequences.
- The legal drinking age is 21 years. Use or purchase of alcohol by individuals younger than 21 years or selling alcohol to individuals younger than 21 years is illegal.
- Alcoholism is physical dependency on alcohol (addiction).
- One drink is the same as a 12-ounce glass of beer, a 5-ounce glass of wine, or a 1.5-ounce shot of liquor. Each of these has the same amount of alcohol.

How common is alcohol use among teenaged girls?

- 85% of female high school seniors say they have ever tried alcohol
 - 61% say they have been drunk at least once
 - 54% say they have had alcohol in the past month
 - 33% say they engaged in binge drinking in the past month
 - 15% say they have ever tried alcohol before the age of 13 years

Why do girls use alcohol?

- Young people give many different reasons for drinking.
 - To feel mature and be like adults
 - To express independence
 - To fit in with a group socially
 - To appear sexually desirable
 - To deal with stress or boredom
 - To cope with depression or difficult situations

Which girls are most likely to abuse alcohol?

- Those whose parents have problems with alcohol
- Those whose friends or siblings drink
- Those who use tobacco or other drugs
- Those who have family problems
- Those who have a history of depression or other mental illness
- Those who have poor academic performance
- Those who have other behavior problems
- Those with a history of physical or sexual abuse

What are the short-term risks of alcohol use?

- Gastrointestinal irritation—nausea, vomiting, and bad breath
- Alcohol in any form can affect thinking and coordination, causing the following situations:
 - Poor decision making
 - Saying things without thinking about the consequence
 - Clumsiness and poor performance in school, sports, or any daily activities
 - Risk of having unprotected sex
 - Risk of being pressured into having sex or being raped
 - Risk of using illegal drugs or misusing prescription drugs
- Excess drinking is a common cause of many serious injuries and deaths caused by the following situations:
 - Car, motorcycle, bicycle, and boat accidents
 - Drowning
 - Falls from windows and balconies
 - Fires
- Excess drinking can cause alcohol poisoning, leading to coma and even death
- Breaking the law—purchase of alcohol by, sale of alcohol to, or use of alcohol by individuals younger than 21 years can lead to arrest, detention, loss of driver's license, and a police record.
- Providing alcohol to individuals younger than 21 years is illegal and can lead to penalties for adults.





What are the risks of long-term use of alcohol?

- Alcoholism—addiction to alcohol
- Failure in school
- Loss of a job
- Difficulty in relationships with friends and family members
- Poor nutrition, vitamin deficiencies
- Loss of strength
- Weight gain or weight loss
- Liver disease, including cirrhosis and cancer
- Stomach ulcers and bleeding
- Cancer of the throat, mouth, and esophagus
- Damage to the pancreas and diabetes
- Damage to the immune system and increased risk of infections
- Permanent brain damage
- Depression and increased risk for suicide

What are the signs that your teenager may be using or abusing alcohol?

- Frequent symptoms of abdominal pain, nausea, and vomiting
- Easy loss of temper and angry outbursts
- Trouble in relationships with family members and others
- Increased rebelliousness at home and school
- Worsening school or job performance
- Change in friends to those who use alcohol or other drugs
- Discovery of beer cans or bottles and liquor bottles in trash or near property
- Suspicious disappearance of alcohol from family supplies

How would you know if your teenager has a drinking problem and needs help?

- You discover that she has ridden in a car driven by someone (including herself) who had been drinking.
- You suspect that she uses alcohol to relax or feel better about herself.
- You suspect or discover that she uses alcohol when alone.
- You learn that she has been in trouble because of alcohol use.

What can you do if your teen has a drinking problem?

- Get the support of someone you trust (family, friends, social worker, school counselor, or religious or spiritual leader).
- Consult a health or mental health professional for advice.
- Find out where she is going and try to keep her away from parties and places where alcohol is served.
- Do not let her drive if there is any chance she will drink and drive. Make a deal with your teenager, similar to the Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD) agreement, for a ride home (with no questions asked if they feel like they are in a difficult situation). This contract is designed to encourage communication between young people and their parents about destructive decisions related to alcohol, drugs, peer pressure, and behavior.
- If your family uses alcoholic beverages for social or religious purposes, it is important for you to model limited and responsible use.
- Consider removing or locking up all alcohol in your home.
- Consider help from support groups, such as Al Anon/Alateen.
- Contact the organizations in this fact sheet for more information.

For More Information

We have provided information on the following organizations and web sites because they have information that may be of interest to our readers. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) does not necessarily endorse the views expressed or the facts presented by these organizations or their web sites. Further, ACOG does not endorse any commercial products that may be advertised or available from these organizations or on these web sites.

Al-Anon/Alateen World Service Office
Telephone: (888) 4AL-ANON (888) 425-2666
Web: www.al-anon.alateen.org

Alcoholics Anonymous
Telephone: (212) 870-3400
Web: www.alcoholics-anonymous.org

American Academy of Family Physicians
Telephone: (913) 906-6000 or (800) 274-2237
Web: www.aafp.org

American Academy of Pediatrics
Telephone: (847) 434-4000
Web: www.aap.org

Drug Strategies
Telephone: (202) 289-9070
Web: www.drugstrategies.org

Join Together
Telephone: (617) 437-1500
Web: www.jointogether.org

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information
Telephone: (800) 729-6686
Web: <http://ncadi.samhsa.gov>

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcohol Information
Telephone: (301) 443-3860
Web: www.niaaa.nih.gov

National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign
Office of National Drug Control Policy
Telephone: (800) 666-3332
Web: www.mediacampan.org
www.theantidrug.com

Partnership for a Drug Free America
Telephone: (212) 922-1560
Web: www.drugfree.org

Students Against Destructive Decisions
Telephone: (877) SADD-INC (723-3462)
Web: www.sadd.org/contract.htm

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
Telephone: (877) SAMHSA-7 (726-4727)
Web: www.samhsa.gov