

Parenting for Prevention: *Alcohol*

About Alcohol

Alcohol is the **most commonly used** and abused drug among youth in the United States.

Youth who start drinking before the age of 15 are **five times** more likely to develop alcohol dependence or abuse later in life.

Alcohol affects everyone differently – age, body mass, gender, family history, and genetics are some of the different factors that influence how an individual responds to alcohol and can predict the risk of addiction.

Teens who drink alcohol place themselves at an **immediate increased risk for unintentional injuries** due to falls, fights, sexual assault, drowning, alcohol poisoning, high-risk choices, and car crashes.

Teens who drink alcohol compromise their academic success, job performance, personal relationships, social & emotional well-being, and ability to make sound decisions.

Long-term alcohol use may result in addiction; malnutrition; high blood pressure, stroke, and other heart-related diseases; liver disease; cancer of the mouth or throat; or brain damage.

Fast Facts

Did you know that all of these drinks have the **SAME** amount of alcohol?



12 oz. beer



8 oz. glass of malt liquor



5 oz. glass of wine



1.5-oz. shot of distilled spirits or liquor

What Parents Need to Know

Alcohol poisoning occurs when there is so much alcohol in the bloodstream that areas of the brain controlling basic life-support functions - such as breathing, heart rate, and temperature control - begin to shut down. **Symptoms** of alcohol poisoning include confusion; difficulty remaining conscious; vomiting; seizures; trouble with breathing; slow heart rate; clammy skin; dulled responses, such as no gag reflex (which prevents choking); and extremely low body temperature.

<http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/AlcoholOverdoseFactsheet/Overdosefact.htm>

Many teens experiment with hard alcohol unaware of the increased risk of alcohol poisoning. They may sneak clear liquor (typically vodka) into water bottles, which go undetected by adults at home or teachers at school. At parties, teens often drink successive shots of alcohol because they do not feel an immediate impact of the alcohol. Both scenarios are dangerous because teens cannot gauge the amount of alcohol they are consuming and cannot regulate their body's response.

Try this activity:

1. Fill an 8 oz. plastic water bottle with water
2. Pour the water into a 1.5 oz. shot glass
3. Spill out the glass and continue counting the number of drinks the water bottle holds (13!!)
4. Discuss the risks of alcohol poisoning with your child

Warning Signs: What to Look For

Teens often display subtle changes in behavior that may indicate alcohol use, drug use, or depression which is often associated with alcohol and drug use. If you notice any of these warning signs, talk with your teen about your concerns. Remind them that you care about their health and well-being. If you suspect or confirm that your teen is using alcohol, talk with your pediatrician about where to get help.

- Hanging out with a new group of friends
- Stops participating in favorite activities, such as sports
- Increased interest in being alone
- Sudden drop in academic performance or missing/skipping school
- Constant discipline problems at home or school
- Increased secrecy
- Borrowing or stealing money
- Sudden or frequent mood swings
- Irritability, depression, anger, aggressiveness
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Difficulty concentrating
- Chronic restlessness



Talking Tips: How to Start a Conversation

Having honest and open communication with your children creates a trusting bond, shows them that you care and opens the door for meaningful discussion. A conversation is like a muscle ... the more you use it, the stronger it gets!

- Start early – the sooner you begin conversations with your children about making healthy choices, the easier it will be to tackle more challenging topics as they get older, such as underage drinking.
- Use everyday opportunities to talk with your teen about alcohol – in the car, while making dinner, or when he/she comes home from school. Mention an item about alcohol you saw in the news or read in the newspaper. Ask - and listen to - their perspective.
- Identify opportunities you see on TV, in the movies, or in their favorite videos or magazines. Ask them how they feel about how alcohol is being portrayed. Are these scenarios realistic? Can they relate to these situations?
- Be clear about your expectations and no-use rules about alcohol use.
- Allow them to be part of the conversation about rules and consequences. Listen to what your teen has to say. Let them ask questions.
- Keep the conversations going – talking about alcohol and underage drinking is not a one-time event. Kids who hear consistent messages on a regular basis about not drinking are at a lower risk for trying alcohol.
- *Remember: Parents are the #1 influence on a teen's decision not to try alcohol.*

RESOURCES

KidsHealth

www.kidshealth.org/parent/positive/talk/alcohol.html

National Institute on Drug Abuse

<http://www.drugabuse.gov/parents-educators>

The Partnership at Drugfree.org

www.drugfree.org/

Words Can Work

www.wordscanwork.com/issues/knowissues.html?topic=2

Make a Difference: Talk to Your Child about Alcohol

http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/MakeADiff_HTML/makediff.htm

Opening Lifesaving Lines:

Negotiating a Contract for Life

http://sadd.org/pdf/05SADD_CFL_F5_2.pdf

Parenting to Prevent Childhood Alcohol Use

<http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/adolescentflyer/adolFlyer.pdf>

7 Ways to Protect Your Teen from Using Alcohol or Drugs

<http://files.hria.org/files/SA1011.pdf>

Parenting for Prevention is a Decisions at Every Turn Coalition educational series for parents and other caring adults to increase awareness and knowledge about important youth issues and to encourage dialogue about making healthy choices.

Please visit <http://www.AshlandDecisions.org/parent-tip-sheets.html> for our complete library of tip sheets.

Decisions at Every Turn Coalition • 65 Union Street, Ashland MA 01721
www.AshlandDecisions.org • CoalitionInfo@AshlandDecisions.org • 508.881.0177 x5226