



# Military Pathways™

Funded by Force Health Protection and Readiness, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, Health Affairs

## FACTS ABOUT ALCOHOL

### What is a Standard Drink?

A standard drink contains about 14 grams (about 0.6 fluid ounces of pure alcohol. Below are some approximate drink equivalents:

- 12 oz. of beer or cooler
- 8-9 oz. of malt liquor
- 5 oz. of table wine
- 3-4 oz. of fortified wine
- 2-3 oz. of cordial, liqueur or aperitif
- 1.5 oz. of brandy or spirits

### Types of Alcohol Problems

- Relatively low levels of alcohol consumption may increase risk for motor vehicle crashes, medication interactions, fetal effects, strokes caused by bleeding, and certain cancers. [1]
- Alcohol use disorders include alcohol dependence (known as alcoholism) and alcohol abuse. [2] Alcohol abuse is characterized by clinically significant impairment or distress but does not entail physical dependence. [3]
- Alcohol dependence (alcoholism) is characterized by 10 diagnostic criteria according to the DSM-IV. These criteria include: impaired control over drinking, tolerance, withdrawal syndrome when alcohol is removed, neglect of normal activities for drinking and continued drinking despite recurrent related physical or psychological problems. [4]

### Who Has An Alcohol Problem?

- 25 percent of U.S. children are exposed to alcohol abuse or dependence in the family. [5]
- Between 2001 and 2002, the prevalence of alcohol abuse was highest among Native Americans (5.75%) followed by Whites (5.10%), Blacks (3.29%), Hispanics (3.9%), and Asians (2.13%). [6]
- Alcohol abuse and dependence are more common among males than females and decrease with aging. [7]
- Between 2001 and 2002, 8.5 percent of adult Americans --17.6 million -- met DSM-IV diagnostic criteria for either alcohol dependence or alcohol abuse. [8]

### Harmful Effects of Alcohol

- Alcohol-related crashes (i.e., those in which a driver or pedestrian had a blood alcohol concentration [BAC] greater than zero) account for 41 percent of all fatal car accidents. [9]
- Alcohol use contributes to a range of chronic health consequences including cancer and cardiovascular disease. [10]
- Alcohol use has been associated with increased risk of traumatic injury including: motor vehicle crashes, bicycling accidents, pedestrians, falls, fires, injuries in sports and recreational activities, interpersonal violence, and self-inflicted injuries. [11]
- The economic costs of alcohol abuse in the United States are estimated to be approximately \$185 billion annually.[12]



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## Alcohol and Women

Women are more vulnerable than men to many of the medical consequences of alcohol use. Alcoholic women develop cirrhosis, damage of the heart muscle (i.e., cardiomyopathy), and nerves (i.e., peripheral neuropathy) after fewer years of heavy drinking than alcoholic men. [13]

Women develop organ damage faster, and at lower levels of alcohol consumption than men. This is because a woman's body generally has less water than a man's causing their blood alcohol content to reach higher level, faster.[14]

Alcohol use may affect female reproductive. Adolescent girls who consume even moderate amounts of alcohol may experience disrupted growth and puberty. Heavy drinking in adult women can disrupt normal menstrual cycling and reproductive functions. Alcohol abuse and alcoholism can cause women to suffer from infertility, increased risk for spontaneous abortion, and impaired fetal growth and development. [15]

Women overall drink less than men but are more likely to experience adverse consequences including damage to the heart muscle, liver, and brain, trauma resulting from auto crashes, interpersonal violence, and death.[16]

The progression of alcoholism appears to be faster in women than in men.[17]

## Alcohol and Older Drinkers

- Alcohol-related problems, including interactions with prescription and over-the counter drugs, account for most of the substance related problems experienced by older adults. [18]
- Heavy alcohol consumption is known to result in memory deficits. Heavy alcohol consumption also may increase the risk for Alzheimer's disease in both genders and in women in particular, as they appear to be more vulnerable than men to alcohol-induced brain damage. [19]
- Because of age-related body changes, the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism recommends that older drinkers consume no more than one drink a day. [20]

## Alcohol and Youth

- Young persons reporting first use of alcohol before age 15 were more than 5 times as likely to have past alcohol dependence or abuse compared with persons who first used alcohol at age 21 or older (16 % vs. 3%) .[20]
- Approximately 20% of 8th graders, 35% of 10th graders, and 48% of 12th graders report having consumed alcohol during the past month.[21]
- About 12% of 8th, 22% of 10th, and 28% of 12th graders report binge drinking (five or more drinks on a single occasion during the past two weeks).[22]
- Almost 40% of high school seniors perceive no great risk in consuming four to five drinks nearly every day.[23]

## Alcohol and College Students

- Over 44% of full-time college students reported consuming five or more drinks on the same occasion at least once in the past 30 days. [24]
- 1400 college students between the ages of 18 and 24 die each year from alcohol-related unintentional injuries, including motor vehicle crashes.[25]
- More than 600,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 are assaulted each year by another student who has been drinking. [26]



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