



Drugs and Alcohol Information

Get informed, stay smart, stay safe

Alcohol: Factsheet



Evidence ratings:

This resource has undergone expert review. See our [Help/Q&A section](#) for more details.

Year: Year 7–8, Year 9–10, Year 11–12

Targeted Drugs: Alcohol

Tags: booze, grog

Time Allocated: Partial lesson (under 45mins)

Origin: Australian

Cost:

Free

Attachments

[Alcohol: Detailed Resource \(for Parents/Teachers\)](#)

What is alcohol?

Alcohol is a colourless liquid contained in wine, beer, spirits and other alcoholic drinks. Alcohol is a depressant because it slows down the way your brain relays information to the rest of the body. The legal age to buy alcohol in Australia is 18 years of age.

Types of alcohol include:

- Beer
- Wine, including sparkling (fizzy) wines
- Cider
- Spirits (e.g. vodka, gin, rum, bourbon, whisky)
- Liqueurs (e.g. coffee, hazelnut or melon flavoured alcohol)
- Pre-mixed drinks, also known as ready-to-drinks (e.g. cans of bourbon and cola, bottles of vodka or rum mixed with soft drink, vodka mixed with chocolate milk)
- Fortified wines (e.g. port, sherry).

How long do the effects last?

The effect of alcohol varies greatly from person to person and depends on things like gender, age, size, mood, medical conditions, and whether it is taken together with other drugs.

Drinks also vary greatly in how much alcohol they contain. The more alcohol a drink contains, the longer it takes for the body to process. In Australia, one "standard drink" is a drink that contains 10 grams of pure alcohol. As you can see in the image below, different drinks contain different amounts of alcohol. To test your knowledge, you might like to complete our "Understanding standard drinks" worksheet.

NUMBER OF STANDARD DRINKS

SPIRITS & PRE-MIXED SPIRITS



BEER



WINE (inc. champagne)

CIDER



What are the effects?

Alcohol is the most commonly used recreational drug in Australia. After tobacco, it is the second leading cause of drug-related death and hospital admissions. Some harms are linked to drinking too much on one occasion (e.g. injuries, unsafe sex, alcohol poisoning) while other harms are linked to regular drinking (e.g. liver problems, addiction).

The effects of alcohol may include:

Immediate

- Slower breathing and heart rate
- Drowsiness
- Feeling of relaxation
- Loss of inhibitions
- Dehydration
- Unsteadiness, loss of coordination
- Risky behaviour (e.g., unsafe sex)
- Confusion
- Nausea, vomiting
- Can cause the user to become unconscious.

Long-term

- Dependence (addiction)
- Increased risk of anxiety and depression
- Increased risk of diabetes and obesity
- Brain damage
- Malnutrition
- Heart problems
- Liver problems
- Cancer
- Alcohol use during pregnancy can lead to serious birth defects.

Young People and Alcohol

The human brain is still developing and maturing well into the 20s. **Research findings show that drinking alcohol during the teenage years can disrupt healthy brain development.** For this reason, teenagers are advised to avoid drinking for as long as possible. Starting to drink at an earlier age also places young people at greater risk of developing alcohol-related problems later in life.

When alcohol is absorbed, it is distributed throughout the water held in a person's body. On average, young people have a smaller body mass than adults and so have less water. This means that in a younger person there is less water to dilute the alcohol, so the alcohol will have a greater effect. Younger people may lack experience of drinking and might not know how it will affect them. When young people do drink, it is often out with friends in a situation where they are at high-risk of accidents or injury.

Alcohol Use Among Young Australians

The use of alcohol among young people aged 12-17 declined from 74% in 2011 to 66% in 2017. This means that in 2017 about one in three (34%) young people in Australia have never consumed alcohol and reflects a downward trend over recent decades. More young people in Australia are choosing not to drink.

Rates of high-risk drinking among young people, however, remain high. One in four young people in Australia report drinking five or more alcoholic drinks in a single session in the past month (23%). While any alcohol consumption is risky for teenagers, high-risk drinking is defined as drinking an amount that increases the risk of accident or injury. Among young people who had drunk alcohol, one in three reported they did something they later regretted (28%) and most (59%) could think of at least one negative outcome related to their drinking. It is important that young people understand the effects of alcohol and the potential negative consequences so that they can make informed decisions.

Source: Guerin, N. & White, V. (2018). ASSAD 2017 Statistics & Trends: Australian Secondary Students' Use of Tobacco, Alcohol, Over-the-counter Drugs, and Illicit Substances. Cancer Council Victoria.

Personal Stories

"What worries me about alcohol is the thought of getting too drunk and that you could hurt a mate or do something you regret." - Daniel*, 14

Alcohol and Driving

Alcohol is a huge contributor to accidents, deaths and injuries on the roads each year. Driving requires concentration, good coordination and reflexes, and the ability to make accurate judgements and decisions. Alcohol reduces all of these abilities. The risk of serious injury and death from drink driving is greater in regional and rural areas, so people who live in those communities should be especially careful.

Research shows that injuries and deaths from drink driving are much greater among young people than adults. This is why the legal alcohol limit is zero for learner and provisional licence holders.

Evidence

This factsheet was developed following expert review by researchers at the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use, The University of Sydney, the National Drug & Alcohol Research Centre, UNSW. See detailed attachment for a list of sources for this information.

- Credit to Dr Tina Lam, National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University, WA for the Standard Drinks Chart.

Page last reviewed: 8 May 2019.