

### Alcohol and Binge Drinking

**Alcohol is a depressant.** It is classified as a drug because it changes a person's physical and emotional state. It reduces a person's ability to think rationally and distorts judgment. In small amounts (one beer or one glass of wine), alcohol slows the action of the nerve cells in the body causing a "loosened up" feeling. In larger quantities, more than the body can process, a person will start to feel "awkward" or lose coordination and control. Alcohol slows down the central nervous system, impairing vision, reaction time, and coordination. Alcohol also affects the function of the stomach and kidneys, which can result in nausea, vomiting, and dehydration. Because alcohol impairs judgment it can cause an increase in risk-taking behaviors. Long-term drinking can cause tissue damage and increase the risk for high blood pressure, heart rhythm disorders, heart muscle disorders, stroke, and the development of cancers and liver disease.

One of the reasons people might begin drinking alcohol is **Peer Pressure**. Peer pressure is the influence people your own age have on your thoughts and actions. People may feel pressure to conform so they fit in or feel accepted, or so they don't feel awkward or uncomfortable. When people are unsure of what to do in a social situation, they naturally look to others for cues about what is and isn't acceptable.

The number one cause of death among teens is motor vehicle accidents. A majority of these accidents are alcohol-related because alcohol slows reaction time, affects your vision, makes you drowsy, reduces your coordination and affects your judgment. Even 1 drink impairs the ability to be able to drive.

**Binge drinking** is consuming large quantities of alcohol in a single session, usually five or more drinks at one time for a man, and four or more drinks for a woman. About 90% of the alcohol consumed by youth under the age of 21 in the United States is in the form of binge drinking.

One of the biggest issues related to binge drinking is **Alcohol Poisoning**. Alcohol poisoning is a serious, and sometimes deadly, consequence of drinking large amounts of alcohol in a short period of time. Drinking too much too quickly can affect your breathing, heart rate, body temperature and gag reflex and potentially lead to coma and death because oxygen no longer reaches the brain. People can "pass out" after drinking too much alcohol and never wake up. A person with alcohol poisoning needs immediate medical attention. Symptoms of alcohol poisoning are confusion, vomiting, seizures, slow breathing (less than eight breaths a minute), irregular breathing, blue-tinged skin or pale skin, low body temperature, and passing out.

**ALCOHOL POISONING IS AN EMERGENCY!** Call 911. Be prepared to provide information. **Don't leave an unconscious person alone.** Letting a friend "sleep it off" is not a wise decision! It is critical that someone with alcohol poisoning receive immediate medical care. Help a person who is vomiting (keep them sitting up or turn them on their side if laying down). Don't be afraid to get help!

