

Alcohol

Substance abuse is a major issue for our nation. Many people use harmful substances because of peer pressure. Peer pressure is the influence people your own age have on your thoughts and actions. Substance abuse can take a toll on the emotional and physical health of the user as well as the user's family and friends. The habitual use of many drugs and other harmful substances can lead to addiction.

Alcohol is one of the most abused substances of teens because of its availability. Alcohol is a depressant drug. 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. Alcohol impairs judgment and causes an increase in risk-taking behaviors. Long-term drinking can cause tissue damage and increases the risk for high blood pressure, heart rhythm disorders, heart muscle disorders, stroke, and the development of cancers and liver disease.

Alcohol is absorbed into the bloodstream via small blood vessels in the walls of the stomach and small intestine. Within minutes of drinking, alcohol travels from the stomach to the brain, where it quickly produces its effects, slowing the action of nerve cells.

A young person's body cannot cope with alcohol the same way an adult can. Drinking is more harmful to teens than adults because their brains are still developing throughout adolescence and well into young adulthood. Drinking during this critical growth period can lead to lifelong damage in brain function.

Binge Drinking

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.

Alcohol Poisoning

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.

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! They may not wake back up! 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!

Check for Understanding

- What are two effects of alcohol on the body?

- Why do you think people drink alcohol?

- What do you do if you think a friend has alcohol poisoning?

- How can you stay away from the temptation of drinking?

Coach's Reflection: