



Alcohol...Is It Just A Drink?

Most people drink alcohol responsibly most of the time.

However, some people may consume alcohol at a level that increases their risk of harm, including injury and disease.

What is Alcohol?

Alcohol is any beverage containing Ethanol. It is one of the oldest known drugs and has been used by humans for centuries. It is also known by many other names including grog, booze, plonk and brew.

The term 'alcohol' is typically used for Ethanol, or ethyl alcohol. Ethanol is produced by the fermentation of carbohydrates by yeasts and can occur naturally in overripe and rotting fruits.

The differences between alcoholic drinks (such as beer and spirits) are due to the methods and ingredients used to produce the beverage.

Alcohol is typically drunk in a beverage though it can be used in cooking where most (but not all) of the alcohol burns or vaporises away.

Alcohol is a central nervous system depressant meaning it slows down messages to and from the brain.

Standard Drinks

Alcohol is measured in 'Standard Drinks'.

1 standard drink is 10 grams of alcohol. A drink is often much more than a 'standard drink'. When sold, alcoholic drinks in wine bottles, cans etc are labelled with how many standard drinks are in each bottle/can. This allows you to keep track of how many standard drinks are being consumed.

Alcohol causes a wide range of effects:

- Slurred speech
- Nausea
- Drowsiness
- Vomiting
- Poisoning
- Relaxation
- Impaired movement
- Impaired thinking
- Talkativeness
- Altered mood
- Unconsciousness /passing out

Once consumed, these effects start within 5 to 10 minutes and last roughly as long as it takes for the alcohol to leave your body. Drinking coffee, fresh air, sweating, vomiting, cold showers will not speed up the process of alcohol leaving your bloodstream.

The levels of alcohol in your bloodstream is referred to as **B**lood **A**lcohol **C**oncentration (BAC).

A BAC of 0.05% (“point o-five”) means that there is 0.05g of alcohol in every 100ml of blood.

How long does alcohol stay in the body?

Alcohol is water-soluble – it is distributed in the water in people’s bodies. Because of this, the same number of standard drinks will cause a different Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) in different people. The less diluted alcohol is in the water of the body, the higher the BAC. This is why women often have a higher BAC than men after drinking the same amount – men have more water in their body, and so the alcohol is more diluted.

Alcohol is metabolised (processed) almost entirely by the Liver. The liver can process about 1 standard drink per hour, so the amount of time it stays in the body depends on how much you have had to drink. If you have 10 standard drinks, you are likely to still have some alcohol in your body 10 hours later.

Risks

Risks to Health

Alcohol use is associated with some risks to health such as:

Alcohol and Other Drugs

Alcohol in combination with other drugs, including legal drugs such as caffeine, anti-histamines, or prescription medications can interact in unexpected ways and potentially have unintended side-effects.

Accident, Injury, and Driving

Alcohol can impact an individual’s ability to think clearly, to drive safely, and increases the potential for falls, burns, drownings and machinery related accidents. A person who has drunk alcohol should not drive or operate any heavy machinery until the effects have passed. Too much alcohol in one sitting can cause poisoning.

Pregnancy

Alcohol is known to cause birth defects and brain damage, known as fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD). Because of this, it is safest to avoid alcohol completely during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

Tolerance and Dependency

Repeated use of alcohol over a period of time can cause tolerance – this means that the body needs a higher dose of the drug to achieve the same desired effect. Repeated use can also cause dependency, where a person has a very strong desire to continue using alcohol (even if there are negative consequences), and may have difficulty stopping.

A person who has an alcohol dependency may experience withdrawal effects if they try to stop drinking, such as shaking of the hands, increased heart rate, sweating and nausea. It is very important to seek medical advice about safely managing alcohol withdrawal.

Long Term Health

Long term use of alcohol can cause a number of serious health problems, including various cancers (stomach and bowel, mouth and throat etc.), brain damage and stroke, liver disease (fatty liver, cirrhosis), depression, anxiety, psychosis, reduced fertility, impotence, and more.

The Law

In Australia, alcohol laws differ between states and territories. Generally, alcohol is legal to buy and consume for people over the age of 18. In some states, people under 18 years may drink with a parent or guardian's permission.

Some states also have restrictions on the hours that take-away alcohol can be sold, having open alcohol containers in public, and licensing for the sale of alcohol.

Behind the Wheel

Australia has strict laws regarding Blood Alcohol Content while driving. It is **illegal** for a fully licensed driver to operate a vehicle with a BAC greater than 0.05, and for a learner or provisional driver to operate a vehicle with a BAC greater than 0.00

Help and Info

If you'd like to speak to someone, local treatment services will be able to provide support for you and your family, and can answer any questions you may have about alcohol, withdrawal, and recovery.

- Parents, Elders and trusted friends
- GPs and Pharmacists
- Your Local Alcohol and Other Drug Services
- or look under A in the phone book
- Fire, Ambulance, Police 000
- Lifeline Australia 13 11 14
- Kid's Helpline 1800 55 1800
- Poisons Information Centre 13 11 26
- Family Drug Support a 24/7 service
- fds.org.au or 1300 368 186
- [CODE](http://CODE.org.au) – Community Online Drug Education
- tuneinnotout.com – youth website
- fasdhub.org.au – Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
- Medicines Line 1300 MEDICINE
- Get the effects by txt! 0439 TELL ME
- Simply text the name of the drug you want to know about