

Alcohol.

What is alcohol?

Alcohol is a depressant drug, which means it slows down the messages travelling between the brain and the body.¹

Other names

Booze, grog, piss, liquor, charge, nip.

Effects of alcohol

There is no safe level of drug use. Use of any drug always carries some risk. It's important to be careful when taking any type of drug.

Alcohol affects everyone differently, based on:

- size, weight and health
- whether the person is used to taking it
- whether other drugs are taken around the same time
- the amount drunk
- the strength of the drink.

You may experience:

- feeling relaxed
- trouble concentrating
- slower reflexes
- increased confidence
- feeling happier or sadder, depending on your mood.¹

If you consume a lot of alcohol, you might experience:

- confusion
- blurred vision
- clumsiness
- memory loss
- nausea, vomiting
- passing out
- coma
- death.^{1,2}

Hangovers

The following day, you may have a hangover, which is:

- headache
- diarrhoea and nausea
- tiredness and trembling

- increased heart rate and blood pressure
- dry mouth
- trouble concentrating
- anxiety
- poor or decreased sleep.^{3,4}

Sobering up

To sober up takes time. The liver gets rid of about one standard drink an hour. Sweating it out with exercise, cold showers, coffee, fresh air or vomiting will not speed up the process. They may ease the symptoms, but they do not remove alcohol from the bloodstream any faster. This means it may not be safe to drive or work the following day.^{3,4}

Long term effects

Regular use of alcohol may eventually cause:

- difficulty getting an erection
- depression
- poor memory and brain damage
- difficulty having children
- liver disease
- cancer
- high blood pressure and heart disease
- needing to drink more to get the same effect
- physical dependence on alcohol.^{4,5,6}

Drinking alcohol with other drugs

The effects of drinking and taking other drugs – including over-the-counter or prescribed medications – can be unpredictable and dangerous, and could cause:

Alcohol + cannabis: nausea, vomiting, panic, anxiety and paranoia.⁶

Alcohol + energy drinks (with caffeine), ice, speed or ecstasy: more risky behaviour, body under great stress, overdose more likely.⁴

Alcohol + GHB or benzodiazepines: decreased heart rate, overdose more likely.⁴

Withdrawal

Giving up alcohol after drinking it for a long time is challenging because the body has to get used to functioning without it. Please seek advice from a health professional.

Withdrawal symptoms can start within a few hours after the last drinks and can last for 2 – 7 days. These symptoms can include:

- sweating
- tremors
- nausea
- anxiety, irritability, difficulty sleeping
- seizure of fits
- delusions and hallucinations
- death.¹

Find out more about withdrawal at adf.org.au/alcohol-drug-use/supporting-a-loved-one/withdrawal/

Getting help

If your use of alcohol is affecting your health, family, relationships, work, school, financial or other life situations, you can find help and support.

Help and support services directory: adf.org.au/help-support/support-services-directory/

Information about treatment: adf.org.au/alcohol-drug-use/supporting-a-loved-one/treatment/

Alcohol and the law

There are laws that govern how alcohol may be used. These laws may differ depending on the state, territory or local area. For example, in some areas local by-laws make it illegal to drink alcohol in public places such as beaches, parks and streets.

It is an offence for a person who is under 18 years of age to buy, receive or drink alcohol on licensed premises, unless they are with a parent or guardian.

In some states in Australia, it is also an offence to supply a person under 18 years of age with alcohol in a private home, unless the young person's parent or guardian has given permission and the alcohol is supplied in a responsible manner. This is known as secondary supply.

It is illegal to drive under the influence of alcohol.

Penalties for breaking these laws can include fines, imprisonment and disqualification from driving.

Employers have legal obligations in relation to health and safety of their workers and people who visit their workplace.

Drinking statistics

National

- Alcohol is the most widely used drug in Australia.
- The age group with the greatest number of Australians who drink daily is 70+ years.⁸
- Around 1 in 5 (17.1%) Australians over 14 drink at levels that put them at risk of alcohol-related harm over their lifetime.⁸
- Around 1 in 7 (15%) people aged 12 years or older had consumed 11 or more standard drinks on a single drinking occasion in the past 12 months.⁸
- 1 in 4 women drink alcohol while pregnant, even though the Australian alcohol guidelines recommend not drinking during this time.⁹
- \$7b is generated by alcohol-related tax. But alcohol costs society \$15.3b annually.¹⁰
- Alcohol caused more than twice as many deaths (3,494) than road accidents (1,600) in 2005.¹¹
- 1 in 10 workers say they have experienced the negative effects of a co-worker's use of alcohol.^{12,13}

Young People

- Young Australians (aged 14–24) have their first full serve of alcohol at 16.1 years on average.⁸
- 82% of 12–17 year olds have not consumed alcohol in the last 12 months.⁸
- 17% of sexually active students reported that the last time they had sex they were drunk or high.¹⁵
- Alcohol contributes to the 3 major causes of teen death: injury, homicide and suicide.¹⁵
- Nearly half (47%) of people aged 12 or older had their first glass of alcohol supplied by a friend and almost one-quarter (24%) were supplied their first glass by their parent.⁸

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Always call an ambulance on triple zero (000) if an overdose is suspected: tell the paramedic exactly what has been taken. Paramedics are there to help and will not involve the police unless there is a danger to themselves or others.

Other help, support services and resources

Links to further help and support • adf.org.au/help-support/
 Information on alcohol and pregnancy • adf.org.au/insights/alcohol-and-pregnancy

Further information

DrugInfo • 1300 85 85 84

Free confidential information and advice about alcohol and other drugs (9am - 5pm, Mon-Fri)

Family Drug Help • 1300 660 068 • www.familydrughelp.com.au (Victorian-based)

Services are available to support those around you who may be affected by your drug use. As well as providing understanding, they can provide information about how best to help during treatment.

Family Drug Support • 1300 368 186 • www.fds.org.au (Australia-wide)



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