



## ALCOHOL

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Alcohol also can disrupt mood and behavior, causing individuals who drink to excess to engage in behaviors that are out of character. Alcohol also lowers inhibitions, which can lead to irresponsible behavior.

Moderate drinking may help the heart, but excessive alcohol consumption can damage the heart, potentially causing cardiomyopathy, or stretching and drooping of the heart muscle. Excessive consumption of alcohol can also lead to an irregular heart beat and high blood pressure, and over time, excessive drinking may induce stroke.

Drinking too much can weaken your immune system, making your body a much easier target for disease. The National Institutes of Health notes that men and women who regularly overconsume alcohol are more likely to contract diseases like pneumonia and tuberculosis than people who do not overconsume alcohol.

Alcohol also can damage the liver and pancreas. Heavy drinking can cause fatty liver; inflammation, known as alcoholic hepatitis; fibrosis; and cirrhosis. Alcohol causes the pancreas to produce toxic substances that can inflame blood vessels in the pancreas and prevent proper digestion.

### The Very Bad

The body often treats alcohol as a poison and attempts to fight back against

this perceived poison. It produces an enzyme called alcohol dehydrogenase, or AD, which reaches the alcohol when it passes through the stomach lining and liver. Its goal is to sober you up by taking a hydrogen atom off the ethanol molecules in the alcoholic drink, rendering it into a nonintoxicating substance. Some think AD plays a role in hangovers. Aspirin can reduce the effectiveness of the body's AD enzymes, making hangovers worse.

People who overconsume alcohol may be inadvertently poisoning their bodies with alcohol. Receptors in the stomach, intestines and the brain recognize when the body has been infiltrated by a suspecting invader or poison. In an effort to protect itself, the body may try to expel the offending substance to safeguard itself from damage. This is why many people vomit after they consume an excessive amount of alcohol.

Drinking too much alcohol may be linked to a greater risk of developing certain cancers. Researchers have linked overconsumption of alcohol to cancers of the mouth, esophagus,

throat, liver, and breast.

Reckless behavior spurred on by lowered inhibitions that result in poor decisions is another potentially dangerous, and sometimes deadly, side effect of overconsumption of alcohol. For example, men and women who drink excessive amounts of alcohol often feel capable of driving even when their blood alcohol concentration limit is exceeding the legal limit. Driving while intoxicated can lead to injury and even death, and oftentimes innocent motorists are injured or even killed simply because they were sharing the road with inebriated drivers. Even at the legal blood alcohol concentration limit of .08 percent, muscle coordination is lost, reaction time and hearing is impaired and judgment and self-control are hindered. As an individual's BAC increases, these symptoms are only exacerbated.

Drinking alcohol has various effects on the body depending on the amount and frequency that a person drinks. Learning the facts may motivate men and women to consume alcohol more responsibly.

# HAND OVER YOUR KEYS

## Hold On to What Matters

Drinking and driving can take away everything that matters most to you:

- Your freedom • Your job
- Your reputation • Your future
- **EVEN YOUR LIFE**

Make a commitment to yourself and others to drive sober this season.



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