

What Is a Drink?

An alcoholic drink is any drink that contains half an ounce of alcohol.

A 12-ounce can of beer, a 4-ounce glass of wine, a 10-ounce wine cooler or a "shot" (1 ounce at 100 proof) of hard liquor each contain half an ounce of alcohol. Beer and wine are as dangerous as hard liquor.

What Happens When You Drink?

Alcohol goes directly from your stomach into your bloodstream. It is quickly carried to your brain, liver and other major organs in your body.

Your liver helps your body get rid of the alcohol. But if you drink more than your liver can handle, alcohol builds up in your body. The more alcohol there is in your body, the more impaired you become.

Only time will sober a person up. Drinking strong coffee won't help. It takes about an hour for the liver of a healthy 150-pound man to get rid of 1 drink.

How Much Is Too Much?

People respond differently to alcohol. So there is no way to know what amount is safe.

Many things affect how alcohol makes a person act and feel:

- Size, age and gender.
- How fast you drink.
- Having food in your stomach.
- Other drugs.

Women, people who weigh less, or people who drink on an empty stomach usually react to alcohol more quickly. Young people are more affected by alcohol than older people.

Using alcohol with another drug can change the effects of both drugs. Many deaths have resulted from mixing alcohol with illegal drugs such as marijuana, cocaine or heroin.

Using alcohol with legal drugs such as sleeping pills, tranquilizers, antidepressants, pain killers and cold or allergy medicines is also dangerous.

Getting More Information

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information
(800) 729-6686

Having sex is an important decision. You don't want it to be something that "just happened" because you were drinking.

Drinking & Abstinence

Deciding not to have sex is an important decision. Drinking can make it harder to stick to your decision.

This brochure is not intended as a substitute for your health professional's opinion or care.
Written by Nora Krantzler, MPH.
© 1999 ETR Associates. All rights reserved.
It is a violation of U.S. copyright law to reproduce any portion of this publication.

ETR 1-800-321-4407
Associates P.O. Box 1830
Santa Cruz, CA
95061-1830

www.etr.org

Title No. R039

Most people know that drinking too much alcohol is unhealthy. Over time, alcohol can damage the liver, heart, nervous system and brain.

Drinking too much at once can make you seriously ill. It can even kill you.

Alcohol can affect lives in other ways, too. Drinking can interfere with important life decisions. Waiting to have sex, or being abstinent, is one of those decisions.

There are a lot of good reasons to be abstinent. But it may not always be easy to stick to your decision. You may feel pressure from a partner or from friends. Or your own sexual feelings might make it easy to forget your reasons for waiting.

Drinking can make sticking with your decision even harder.

1

What's the Problem with Drinking?

Alcohol affects your emotions and can make you feel more relaxed. At the same time, it can impair your judgment so you have less control over your actions.

This can make it hard to stick to your plan not to have sex.

Some Ways to Avoid Sex Until You're Ready

- Be clear about your reasons for wanting to wait.
- Plan ahead to avoid situations that might make it hard to stick to your decision.
- Talk with your partner about your decision.
- Be prepared to resist pressure.

REMEMBER YOUR REASONS

Think about your reasons for waiting. It can help to write them down.

- You might want to wait for the right person.
- You might want to avoid pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease (STD).
- You might not feel ready to have sex.

2

PLAN AHEAD

To stick to your decision to be abstinent for as long as it is right for you, plan ahead.

- Think about times and places where sexual feelings might be strong, or where friends might be drinking.
- Avoid places where there will be pressure to drink.
- Go out with friends who support your choice.

TALK WITH YOUR PARTNER

Talk with your partner about your plan to be abstinent and avoid alcohol.

- Explain your choice and your reasons for not drinking.
- Decide together how to handle situations if they come up.

RESISTING PRESSURE

You may need to know how to resist pressure to drink.

- Practice ways to say no ahead of time. If you're offered a drink, you can say, "No thanks" or "I'll pass."
- Ask for a soft drink.
- Volunteer to be the designated driver. That way you won't be tempted to drink, and others won't be as likely to pressure you.

3

If You Choose to Drink

- **Know** how alcohol affects your feelings and judgment. Remember that drinking could make you take risks you regret later.
- **Think** about your decision not to have sex at this time in your life. Remember the benefits of waiting.
- **Talk with your partner** about how alcohol can affect sexual decisions. One of you might choose not to drink when the other is drinking.
- **Eat** before you drink. Don't drink on an empty stomach.
- **Don't** let anyone talk you into drinking more than you can manage.
- **Pay close attention** if your partner is drinking. Be prepared to take charge around decisions about sex.
- **Don't** get into an intimate situation if you or your partner has been drinking.
- **Make a plan and set a limit** before you start drinking.

When you need to make important decisions, such as staying abstinent, the best choice is not to drink at all.

4