

## So, what's the big deal —

— Maybe you've gotten drunk and lived to tell about it and even laughed and joked about it. But is it really something to laugh about? Getting drunk, either on a regular or not so regular basis, can have lasting consequences.

### High Risk or Low Risk...

#### Where do you fall?

Everyone is born with a specific tolerance level for alcohol. This level can change over time depending upon how much and how often you drink. In addition, everyone is born with a biological risk level for developing a problem with alcohol. Believe it or not, how much and how often you drink is important. The more you drink the higher your tolerance becomes. The higher your tolerance becomes the more likely you are to place yourself in the high-risk category for developing a problem with alcohol. This continued pattern could eventually lead to alcoholism.

## But I heard that a beer a day keeps the doctor away —

— It is true that drinking one drink a day can help a person reduce their level of “bad” cholesterol while increasing their level of “good” cholesterol. One drink a day can also reduce blood clotting and lower blood pressure. However, on the negative side—it increases chances of heart disease and women's risk of developing breast cancer.

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# What's the big deal about getting drunk?



## Facing the Consequences

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## Biology

+ Drinking Choices

= High Risk



Everyone has some level of risk for developing a problem with alcohol and some people have an increased risk. Research has shown that if you have a history of alcoholism in your family you are four times more likely to develop a problem yourself.

Even if you have no family history, you are not “out of the woods.” There are other factors that influence the development of a problem, beginning with how much and how often you drink.

Your drinking choices are dependent upon various psychological and social factors. Your friends can influence your drinking choices. Your self-esteem can influence your drinking choices. Your view on alcohol and getting drunk can influence your drinking choices. Many college students think that it’s fun to get drunk and funny to be drunk. But what’s not so funny is what it can sometimes lead to.

### Impairment + Any Situation = Problems

Being impaired can lead to problems. For example, unwanted sexual encounters, unprotected sex, injuries and sometimes death. Impairment begins with the first drink. Research shows that anyone who drinks four or more drinks on one day greatly increases their risk for impairment. Sound familiar?

## So Now What?

There is research that suggests that some alcohol use can be helpful and have little risk – but not NO risk. However, there needs to be some guidelines for this lower-risk usage.

- Anyone who is under the age of 21 is always taking a risk when they drink because it’s illegal.
- It takes the body one to one and a half hours to metabolize one standard drink (12 oz. can of beer, 1 oz. shot, 5 oz. glass of wine). So if you allow your body time to process the alcohol you consume this is lower risk.
- Chugging, gulping and playing drinking games are all high-risk activities and should be avoided.
- Eating high protein foods, such as meats and cheeses, before and during drinking slows the absorption of alcohol into the blood stream.

## And Your Point Is?

After all of this you may still be saying to yourself, “so what’s your point? I drink, but only occasionally.” Why is it high risk to get drunk?

- As suggested by research, we all have a risk level for developing problems with alcohol. Whenever you get drunk, you increase your risk for problematic behaviors and situations.
- Getting drunk increases tolerance to alcohol. Whenever you drink beyond your tolerance, the body then adapts, allowing you to be able to drink a little more the next time before you begin to feel impaired. So over time you tolerate larger and larger amounts. The main problem is that you may begin to feel that you can handle all of this alcohol and are not affected by it. But in truth your body is still affected but has accommodated to it and fooled you into thinking you are still okay.
- Getting drunk can create state dependent learning. This means that things you learn to do when you are drunk will be best recalled or feel most comfortable when you are drunk again. Have you ever tried to play certain drinking games when you’re sober and you just don’t seem to do as well? This is because of state dependent learning. The harmful thing is that some people may begin to believe that they can only do certain things as well or with comfort if they are drunk. Maybe you know people who cannot dance or socialize unless they have a “good buzz.”

- If you get drunk, there is a possibility that you could experience a memory blackout. Blackouts occur because alcohol has interfered with the way the brain processes information. Whenever a blackout happens you are awake but the next day you will not be able to remember what happened to you. The scary thing about a blackout is that you will never know what you did unless someone tells you.
- Impairment problems are much more likely to occur when you are drunk.
- Research shows that getting drunk impairs abstract-thinking skills, such as understanding ideas and concepts for days and sometimes even weeks.
- Getting drunk can cause physical damage to the body, and even result in death.

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