

# ALCOHOL POISONING



IT'S NOT FUNNY.  
IT'S DEADLY.



## What You Can Do to Help

- If the person is conscious,**  
don't let the person go to bed and just "sleep it off." Stay with him/her and check in case he/she needs medical attention. Have the person drink water, if possible, but do not give him/her aspirin or Tylenol.
- If the person is unconscious,**  
try to wake the person. Call his/her name. Pinch his/her skin. If there is no response, it is a serious situation. Do not hesitate to get help.
- Turn the person on his/her side.**  
This will help keep the airways clear and may prevent choking on vomit. Stay with the person to make sure he/she does not roll over. Only leave if you need to call for help.
- Check the person's breathing.**  
If it seems abnormal (irregular, too slow or too shallow), call 911 immediately!
- Check skin color and temperature.**  
If you notice pale, bluish color, bright red color or clammy skin, this can indicate that the person is not getting enough oxygen. If the body temperature drops it may lead to a cardiac arrest. Call 911 immediately!

Remember, do not wait for all symptoms to appear before calling for help.

## Common Myths That DON'T Work

- Drinking black coffee
- Taking a cold bath or shower
- Walking it off

## Take Action. Save Someone's Life!



Sometimes people are afraid to seek help for a friend who has had too much to drink. They often worry that if they call for medical help, their friend may be angry, face embarrassment or get in trouble with parents or police.

None of these consequences can compare to their friend losing his/her life.

Take action if you are concerned for another's health. It is always better to be safe than sorry. If you are worried and not sure what to do, seek advice from others or call 911.

Taking action can save a life!



## What is Alcohol Poisoning?

Alcohol depresses the nerves that control involuntary actions such as breathing, the heart beat, and the gag reflex (prevents choking). If a person consumes a large amount of alcohol, the slowing down of body functions can lead to passing out and unconsciousness. A fatal dose of alcohol will eventually stop the heart and lungs.

Teenagers are particularly vulnerable to Alcohol Poisoning. It can happen to a first time drinker or a seasoned party animal. When people rapidly drink too much alcohol and then are left to “sleep it off”, they may be found dead in the morning. Alcohol can shut down their breathing and heart functions and kill them within a matter of hours.

### Critical Signs of Alcohol Poisoning

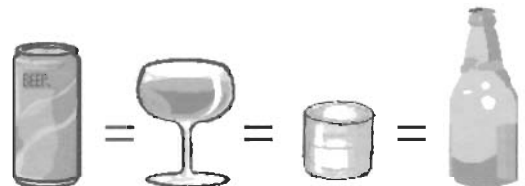
- Mental confusion, stupor, coma, or person cannot be roused
- No response to pinching the skin
- Vomiting while sleeping
- Seizures
- Slow breathing (less than 8 breaths per minute)
- Irregular breathing (10 seconds or more between breaths)
- Hypothermia (low body temperature), bluish skin color, paleness

## How Much Alcohol Will Cause Alcohol Poisoning?

The amount of alcohol that will cause alcohol poisoning depends on gender, size, weight, body composition, tolerance and other factors. Basically, if an average person drinks more than one standard drink (12 oz. beer, 5 oz. wine, 1 oz. hard liquor, 1 wine cooler) per hour, the blood alcohol concentration increases since the body can metabolize only about one drink per hour.

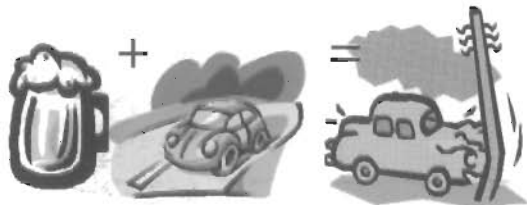


The remaining drinks accumulate as a person continues to drink and could eventually lead to alcohol poisoning. Taking in a lot of shots, funneling or chugging will lead to a rapid increase in Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC). It will take hours for all of the alcohol consumed to reach the brain, so it is very important to constantly evaluate anyone who is semi-conscious or unconscious. A person's BAC can continue to increase even while he or she is passed out!



## If you choose to drink:

- ✓ Drink at a rate of less than one standard drink per hour, or remember this advice - 1 in 2, 2 in 3, 3 in 4 - which means have no more than
- ✓ 1 drink within 2 hours or 2 within 3 hours, etc. This will keep your Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) below serious impairment levels.
- ✓ Avoid slamming, chugging, and drinking games.
- ✓ Don't drink on an empty stomach.
- ✓ Refrain from mixing over-the-counter medicines, prescriptions, illegal drugs or herbal remedies with alcohol. The combination can be deadly.
- ✓ Never drink and drive!!!



## How Can You Prevent Alcohol Poisoning?

Educate friends and family about the seriousness of alcohol poisoning.

Refuse to host underage or binge drinking parties.

Stop friends from drinking in excess

## Alcohol Poisoning is a Medical Emergency!

Alcohol poisoning is a drug overdose and a life-threatening situation. However, people often laugh at a drunk person. If he/she passes out, friends may find it even more comical. In fact, some people think that it is all part of the drinking experience.

This dangerous attitude can be challenged by remembering that alcohol poisoning is a serious medical situation. If your friend comes back from dinner and suddenly vomits and passes out, you may assume that he/she has been poisoned or is very sick. You would naturally offer to get help, call 911, or take your friend

to the hospital. Yet, if the same situation happens because of alcohol, some people may not take it seriously and forget to pay attention.

Unfortunately, 4,000 young people die every year in the U.S. because their friends thought it was no big deal. Those who do manage to survive alcohol poisoning can be left with irreversible brain damage. What was thought to be funny becomes tragic and friends are left with the thought, "I should have done something!"



Mothers Against Drunk Driving  
Northern Virginia Chapter  
P.O.Box 1066  
Fairfax, VA 22030  
Phone: (703) 352-3944  
Fax: (703)237-6660  
[www.maddnova.org](http://www.maddnova.org)  
E-mail [office@maddnova.org](mailto:office@maddnova.org)  
August 2003