

Alcohol Related Emergencies

When alcohol is consumed in excess, it can be poisonous to human systems. Alcohol is also a major factor in more than half of the country's homicides, suicides and traffic accidents. One out of every three 18-24 year olds admitted to emergency rooms for serious injuries are intoxicated at the time of admission.

Given these disturbing facts, there may be times when a person's alcohol use causes you to become concerned for their personal safety as well as the safety of others. The following are some tips on how to interpret what you observe and what to do in case emergencies arise as a result of alcohol use.

Signs and Symptoms

Dangerous signs of alcohol poisoning/overdose include:

- Glazed eyes with pupils that react slowly to light
- Difficulty in focusing eyes
- Inability or difficulty awakening after "passing out"
- Progressive slowness and or irregularity of breathing
- No response to a pain stimulus such as a pinch
- Skin is clammy, pale, or cold
- Blood in vomit (may look like coffee grounds)

***If someone has these DANGER signs, call 911 immediately.
A person in this condition may be unconscious and will need medical attention. You do not need to wait for all symptoms to be present.***

What should you do?

Here are some basic, but essential, procedures you can follow in a situation when someone is drunk:

- Don't communicate any feelings of anxiety to the person and don't ridicule or threaten him/her.
- Before approaching or touching the person, explain what you intend to do in a direct and reassuring manner. For example: "I'm going to help you get home now."
- Keep the person still and comfortable. Don't let him/her walk unattended.
- Do not administer any food, drink or medications, including aspirin or vitamins, because these may cause stomach distress.
- Do not let the person sleep on his/her back. If vomit is inhaled into the lungs, it may result in choking and possibly death. To avoid this, place the person on his/her side, with one arm extended above the head.
- Keep a sober person nearby to watch for signs of trouble and observe the intoxicated person for at least an hour. Do not leave the person unattended.

If the person can talk to you, ask:

- How much has he or she had to drink and how long ago?
- What has he or she had to eat (because of the possibility of vomiting)?
- Whether he or she is injured?
- Whether any other drugs have been taken?

Important Facts to Know

An equivalent percentage of pure alcohol is contained in the following:

12 ounces of *Beer* (5% alcohol concentration)

5 ounces of *Table Wine* (12% alcohol concentration)

1.5 ounces of *Distilled Liquor* (one shot) (40% alcohol concentration or 80 proof)

The peak effect from drinking occurs about thirty minutes after consumption if the stomach is empty.

Each person's capacity to tolerate alcohol is different. Therefore, it is important to be aware of your own limitations to alcohol in order to avoid dangerous intoxication.

Walking, black coffee, or a cold shower will not help. Only *time* will help to sober a person who is intoxicated.

NEVER mix alcohol and drugs. Adding drugs to alcohol can heighten the effects of both substances and create a dangerous combination.

*If someone is experiencing the symptoms of alcohol poisoning
and you suspect that they have mixed alcohol with other drugs call 911 immediately.*

Blood Alcohol Levels

The tables below provide the approximate Blood Alcohol Percentage Level chart for Men and Women:

Women											Men											
Approximate Blood Alcohol Percentage											Approximate Blood Alcohol Percentage											
Drinks	Body Weight in Pounds									Sample Behavioral Effects	Drinks	Body Weight in Pounds									Sample Behavioral Effects	
	90	100	120	140	160	180	200	220	240			100	120	140	160	180	200	220	240			
0	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	Only Completely Safe Limit	0	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	Only Completely Safe Limit
1	.05	.05	.04	.03	.03	.03	.02	.02	.02	.02	Impairment Begins	1	.04	.03	.03	.02	.02	.02	.02	.02	.02	Impairment Begins
2	.10	.09	.08	.07	.06	.05	.05	.04	.04	.04	Driving Skills Significantly Affected; Information Processing Altered	2	.08	.06	.05	.05	.04	.04	.03	.03	.03	Driving Skills Significantly Affected; Information Processing Altered
3	.15	.14	.11	.10	.09	.08	.07	.06	.06	.06		3	.11	.09	.08	.07	.06	.06	.05	.05	.05	
4	.20	.18	.15	.13	.11	.10	.09	.08	.08	.08		4	.15	.12	.11	.09	.08	.08	.07	.06	.06	
5	.25	.23	.19	.16	.14	.13	.11	.10	.09	.09	Legally Intoxicated; Criminal Penalties; Reaction Time Slowed; Loss of Balance; Impaired Movement; Slurred Speech	5	.19	.16	.13	.12	.11	.09	.09	.08	.08	Legally Intoxicated; Criminal Penalties; Reaction Time Slowed; Loss of Balance; Impaired Movement; Slurred Speech
6	.30	.27	.23	.19	.17	.15	.14	.12	.11	.11		6	.23	.19	.16	.14	.13	.11	.10	.09	.09	
7	.35	.32	.27	.23	.20	.18	.16	.14	.13	.13		7	.26	.22	.19	.16	.15	.13	.12	.11	.11	
8	.40	.36	.30	.26	.23	.20	.18	.17	.15	.15	Legally Intoxicated; Criminal Penalties; Reaction Time Slowed; Loss of Balance; Impaired Movement; Slurred Speech	8	.30	.25	.21	.19	.17	.15	.14	.13	.13	Legally Intoxicated; Criminal Penalties; Reaction Time Slowed; Loss of Balance; Impaired Movement; Slurred Speech
9	.45	.41	.34	.29	.26	.23	.20	.19	.17	.17		9	.34	.28	.24	.21	.19	.17	.15	.14	.14	
10	.51	.45	.38	.32	.28	.25	.23	.21	.19	.19		10	.38	.31	.27	.23	.21	.19	.17	.16	.16	

Adapted from BAC Charts produced by the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information.

Subtract .015 for each hour that you take to consume the number of drinks listed in the tables above. For example, if you are a 160 pound woman, and have two drinks in two hours, your BAC would be $.06 - (2 \times .015) = .03$

Blood Alcohol Level (BAL) charts do not take into consideration a wide range of additional variables. These additional variables include:

- Water to body mass ratio
- Age
- Ethanol metabolism
- Tolerance level
- Drugs or medications taken
- Amount/type of food in the stomach during consumption
- Speed of consumption
- General physical condition

Note: BAL charts only provide extremely rough estimates and should never be used alone to determine any individual's safe level of drinking.

Detecting a drinking problem

The ability to detect if someone has a drinking problem beforehand may ultimately enable you to avoid alcohol-related emergency situations. Some basic warning signals that indicate a person may have a drinking problem include someone who:

1. Frequently drinks to the point of intoxication (heavy drinking).
2. Relies on a drink to start the day.
3. Consistently misses appointments, classes, etc. due to hangovers.
4. Has blackouts and loss of memory from drinking.
5. Frequently drinks alone to escape from reality, boredom and loneliness.
6. Often gets injured after drinking.
7. Excessively denies he/she has an alcohol problem when approached about his/her behavior concerning alcohol.
8. Suffers from chronic hangovers and wants a drink to relieve the hangover.
9. Under the influence of alcohol, does something he/she would not do otherwise.

If you have a drinking problem or if you think someone else may have a problem, encourage him/her to seek help.

What is the difference between Moderate, Heavy, and Binge Drinking?

Moderate or “low-risk” drinking

For men:

No more than 4 drinks on any single day AND no more than 14 drinks per week

For women:

No more than 3 drinks on any single day AND no more than 7 drinks per week

Heavy or “at-risk” drinking

For *healthy adults in general*, heavy drinking means consuming more than the single-day or the weekly amounts listed above. About 1 in 4 people who drink above these levels already has alcohol dependence or alcohol abuse problems.

Binge drinking

Binge drinking means drinking so much within about 2 hours that blood alcohol concentration (BAC) levels reach 0.08g/dL.

For women:

this usually occurs after about 4 drinks

For men:

this usually occurs after about 5 drinks

Drinking this way can pose health and safety risks, including car crashes and injuries. Over the long term, binge drinking can damage the liver and other organs.

For More Information:

Student Health Services 619-594-5281
Health Promotion 619-594-4133
Visit Our Website at shs.sdsu.edu
Facebook/Twitter Facebook.com/aztechealth &
@AZTEHealth
SDSU Public Safety
Dps.sdsu.edu 619-594-1991

For counseling or treatment for alcohol abuse:
SDSU Counseling & Psych Services 619-594-5220
SD Health & Human Services Agency
(Department of Drug & Alcohol Services.)
Sdcounty.ca.gov 619-692-5717
Alcoholics Anonymous
AASanDiego.org 619-265-8672