

The university student's guide to

ALCOHOL

Responsible alcohol use: Why bother?

Alcohol is a part of life for most Canadian adults, as well as for many university students. Most people who drink do so responsibly. This means drinking alcohol in amounts that do not increase the risk of negative consequences. Those who do not drink responsibly put themselves at risk for negative consequences, which can affect their physical health, psychological well-being, social and family relationships, career, and academic performance. By using alcohol in moderation, a person can enjoy it as part of a healthy lifestyle while avoiding the pitfalls of alcohol use that can interfere with achieving his or her goals in life.

What is responsible drinking?

Research reveals that alcohol has both positive and negative effects on health and well-being. In small amounts (see box on right), alcohol has been linked to a lower risk of cardiovascular disease. Based on research, experts have recommended levels of alcohol consumption that do not appear to increase risk for disease or other problems including accidents. The risk of alcohol related problems is dose dependant. This means that as the number of drinks increases, so does the risk for problems.

Responsible alcohol use means consuming alcohol in amounts that do not lead to problems. Problems related to alcohol include accidents, fights, deterioration of social or intimate relationships, problems with the law and problems with school (missing classes, declining grades etc.)

Tips for drinking responsibly




- **Become knowledgeable** about the effects of alcohol and about blood alcohol concentration (BAC).
- **Before** starting to drink, **establish limits** and stick to them throughout the night.
- Avoid rounds. Round buying often means you consume more than you have planned.
- Avoid drinking games.
- Bring only enough money for the amount of drinks you plan on having and for taxi/bus/train home. Don't bring a bank card, credit card or borrow money from friends.
- **Eat food** before and while drinking.
- Avoid salty foods, which can make you thirsty.
- Alternate alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks.
- Discover a mocktail (a non-alcoholic cocktail). A few recipes are provided at the end of this section.
- Be generous with water or mixer in mixed drinks.
- **Pace yourself.**
- Avoid slamming, gulping, downing or chugging drinks.
- Put your drink down for a while in a safe place rather than constantly holding on to it.
- Don't give in to pressure. **It's O.K. to say no.**
- Learn how to say no in a polite yet firm manner.
- Beware of drinks with carbonated mixers. They go down faster and get absorbed faster.
- Resist temptation to drink more because you want to take advantage of special prices or an "open bar".
- **A good rule of thumb is no more than 1 drink an hour, no more than 4 per occasion and no more than 13 drinks per week.**
- Avoid drinking when you are angry, in a bad mood, feeling lonely, or are uncomfortable in a social situation.
- **Occupy yourself.** Find something to do while you drink, such as playing darts or pool, chatting, or dancing.
- Keep at least one or two alcohol-free days a week.

GUIDELINES FOR "HEALTHY" ALCOHOL USE

Studies have indicated that some alcohol can be beneficial for health. Based on this information, experts have set the following limits for "healthy" alcohol consumption. Regular consumption above these limits can contribute to poorer health:

- **No more than 1 drink per hour**
- **No more than 2 drinks per day for men**
- **No more than 1 drink per day for women**

Alcohol Equivalents

	=		=	
Spirits		Beer		Wine
43 ml		341 ml		142 ml
1.5 oz		12 oz		5 oz
40 % alcohol		5 % alcohol		12 % alcohol

All contain approximately 0,6 ounce of alcohol and will have an equal effect on the body

What is alcohol?

Alcohol (and we are referring here to beverage alcohol, also known as ethanol or ethyl alcohol) is a substance that acts on the central nervous system. Therefore, the site of action of alcohol in the body is the brain. It depresses the activity of certain functions of the brain. As such, alcohol is classified as a central nervous system depressant. Some of the processes that alcohol depresses are heart rate, respiration, pulse, reaction time and coordination of muscles. There is a common misconception that alcohol is a stimulant because people feel more energetic after a drink or two. This occurs because the initial depressant action of alcohol is to depress inhibitions. This generally creates a "feel good" state that can encourage people to consume more alcohol to prolong the feeling or to enhance it. But as more alcohol is consumed, the depressant effects become more apparent. The effects depend on the amount of alcohol that is in the blood. As this amount increases, the effects become more noticeable and severe, with the most severe consequence being death due to respiratory depression.

The effects of alcohol on the body

In order for alcohol to have any effect, it must get into your bloodstream. When alcohol is consumed it enters the stomach where a small amount (about 10%) is absorbed directly into the bloodstream. The rest of the alcohol is absorbed into the bloodstream through the small intestine. About 90% of the alcohol a person consumes is metabolized by the liver and excreted in the urine as non-active compounds. The rate at which alcohol is metabolized in the liver is relatively constant. The liver can process about a drink an hour, and that rate doesn't speed up if a person drinks more. Other ways that alcohol is eliminated from the blood are directly through the urine without being processed by the liver (2-4%), through the skin as sweat (2-6%), and through the lungs in every breath (2-4%).

The effects that occur as a result of alcohol are dependent on the amount of alcohol circulating in the blood. This is called Blood Alcohol Concentration, or BAC, and is measured as the amount of alcohol in mg per 100 ml of blood. BAC is expressed as a number followed by a percentage sign. For example, 50 mg of alcohol in 100 ml of blood is expressed as .05% (or simply .05).

The effects of alcohol consumption occur in a fairly predictable pattern, although the BAC levels at which they occur may vary slightly. Below is the progression of effects of alcohol consumption and the general BAC levels at which they occur:

- .04%** - Relaxed, reaction time goes down, buzz develops
- .06%** - Judgment impaired, less able to process information
- .08%** - Muscle coordination impaired (fine muscle coordination such as control of fingers is impaired before gross motor coordination of arms and legs)
- .10%** - Movements and speech become clumsy and sloppy, clear breakdown in judgment and motor control, reaction time continues to deteriorate
- .20%** - Very drunk; person can be loud and difficult to understand; emotions unstable, person may stagger or slur their speech
- .25-.35%** - Can pass out, lose consciousness
- .40%** - Lethal dose, difficult to wake up, incapable of voluntary action; breathing can stop and death can occur

A SOCIAL DRINKER TYPICALLY:

- Drinks slowly (doesn't gulp or slam drinks)
- Knows when to stop drinking
- Does not drink to get drunk
- Eats before, or while, drinking
- Never drives after drinking
- Respects non-drinkers
- Knows and obeys laws related to drinking

A PROBLEM DRINKER TYPICALLY:

- Drinks to get drunk
- Tries to solve problems by drinking
- Experiences personality changes. May become loud, angry or violent OR may become silent, remote and reclusive
- Drinks when he or she should not, such as before driving or going to class or work
- Causes other problems, i.e. harms himself or herself, friends, family, or even strangers

AN ALCOHOLIC:

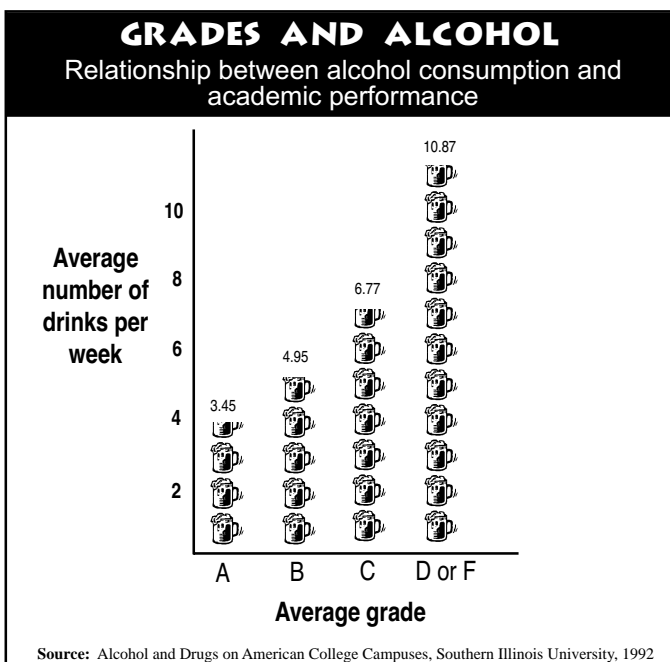
- Spends lots of time thinking about drinking and planning where, and when, to get the next drink
- Keeps bottles hidden for quick pick-me-ups
- Starts drinking without conscious planning and loses awareness of the amount consumed
- Denies drinking
- Drinks alone
- Needs to drink before facing a stressful situation
- May have "blackouts" where the person cannot remember what he or she did while drinking although he or she may have appeared "normal" to people at the time
- Goes from having hangovers to more dangerous withdrawal symptoms, such as delirium tremens ("DT's")
- Has, or causes, major problems with the police, an employer, family, or friends

(Adapted from the ACHA brochure "How To Help A Friend With A Drinking Problem").

Factors that affect Blood Alcohol Concentration

There are several factors that affect BAC and, therefore, the effects you feel from alcohol. They are:

- 1. How much alcohol you consume.** The more alcohol you put into your system, the more your BAC will rise.
- 2. How fast you drink.** The faster you drink, the more the alcohol accumulates in your blood, resulting in a faster rise in BAC.
- 3. Your size and weight.** Alcohol distributes itself throughout lean tissue in the body. In other words, it cannot dissolve in fat. Therefore, the less a person weighs, the less lean tissue they have and the faster their BAC will rise. Also, the more fat a person has in proportion to lean muscle tissue, the faster their BAC will rise.
- 4. Your sex.** Women have less of a stomach enzyme called alcohol dehydrogenase that metabolizes (breaks down) alcohol. This means that more of the alcohol that a woman consumes goes into the intestines and ends up in the blood. Therefore, a woman's BAC will be higher than a man's if they both weigh the same and drink the same amount. Another difference between men and women is that women generally have a smaller volume of blood. Therefore, a given amount of alcohol will be distributed in less volume, which will result in a higher BAC. Also, women generally have a greater proportion of body fat than men which affects their BAC.
- 5. Whether or not you have eaten.** Having food before you have an alcoholic beverage will slow down the rate at which alcohol is absorbed into your bloodstream, especially if the food is high in fat. This means your BAC will rise more slowly. The effect will also be the same if food is eaten while you drink or if non-alcoholic drinks are interspersed with alcoholic drinks. Beware, though, that all the alcohol will eventually enter your bloodstream.
- 6. Use of other drugs or medications.** All drugs are metabolized by the liver. Any medication may compete with alcohol for the attention of the liver. As a result, the elimination of alcohol from the blood will be reduced. Also, the combination of alcohol with other depressant drugs (such as tranquilizers, heroin or Demerol) can be lethal because the depressant effect of alcohol is magnified by these drugs.



POSSIBLE SIGNS OF A DRINKING PROBLEM

The following are potential signs of a drinking problem. The more of these you experience, the more likely you are to have a problem with alcohol.

- Steadily drinking, consuming more alcohol when drinking, or drinking more often.
- Setting limits on how much, how often, when or where you will drink, and then repeatedly violating them.
- Keeping a large supply on hand or becoming concerned when you run low.
- Drinking before you go out with friends who don't drink, or before going to activities where alcohol won't be available.
- **Drinking alone.**
- **Drinking every day.**
- Spending more money than you can afford on alcohol.
- Doing or saying things when you're under the influence that you regret later, or don't remember.
- **Lying to friends and family** about your drinking.
- Becoming accident prone under the influence.
- Regularly hungover the morning after drinking.
- Increased tolerance to alcohol, and decreased hangover symptoms.
- Having academic problems such as missing classes, having difficulty studying, showing little interest in school or declining grades.
- Reducing contact with friends, or experiencing increased problems with important relationships.
- Repeatedly getting drunk.
- Continuing to drink when others have called it quits.
- **Close friends or family express concern over your drinking.**
- Compelled to drink alcohol when lonely, depressed, anxious, etc.
- Experiencing blackouts.
- Feeling more comfortable under the influence of alcohol than when sober.
- A pattern of negative consequences associated with alcohol.
- Rationalizing or excusing the need for alcohol and becoming defensive when others express concern.
- Needing to drink to stay motivated.
- Driving while under the influence of alcohol.

7. **Your experience with alcohol:** Those who drink a lot tend to eliminate alcohol from the blood a little bit more efficiently, thus their BAC rises at a slightly lower rate. The effects you feel from alcohol can reflect your perceptions of how alcohol should affect you. These perceptions may have derived from previous personal experiences with alcohol, from experiences of friends or family, from what you have seen on TV or in movies, or from what you have read in books or magazines.
8. **Your physical and mental condition.** How you feel both mentally and physically when you drink can influence the effects you feel from alcohol. It will not, however, affect your BAC.

The myths about sobering up!

As mentioned before, about 90% of the alcohol a person consumes will be eliminated from their body by being converted by the liver to inactive substances that are excreted in the urine. The rate at which the liver can process alcohol is relatively constant. The liver will not eliminate alcohol at a faster rate if a person consumes a large amount of alcohol. This means that there is no way to sober up quickly; **the only thing that will sober a person up is time.** However, some people still believe that there are ways to sober up. The following will NOT sober up an intoxicated individual.

- **COFFEE:** Providing black coffee in copious amounts only acts as a stimulant, it does not diminish the effects of the alcohol. Instead, you are now facing a wide-awake, caffeine-stimulated drunk!
- **FRESH AIR AND/OR EXERCISE:** Taking a walk won't sober someone up, but it will remove him or her from the source of alcohol for a time. Taking a spin on the dance floor (provided the individual is still able to stand on their own) will provide a similar break in the consumption routine.
- **SWITCHING DRINKS:** Alcohol is alcohol in whatever form. The only drink you may want to switch to is something non-alcoholic (besides coffee) that will allow the body time to absorb the alcohol already consumed.
- **VOMITING:** Vomiting may relieve the nausea that sometimes comes with over-consumption and it may even get rid of some of the alcohol that is still in the stomach. What it won't do, however, is decrease the amount of alcohol in the bloodstream, and that's the only way to become sober.

What is alcohol poisoning?

Alcohol poisoning occurs when someone drinks so much that his or her blood alcohol concentration (BAC) rises to a level where important body processes, such as breathing and heart rate, are affected. Severe alcohol poisoning requires medical attention as it could possibly result in death.

Signs of alcohol poisoning

1. Person is known to have **consumed large quantities of alcohol** in a short period of time.
2. Person is **unconscious** and cannot be woken.
3. Person has **cold, clammy, unusually pale or bluish skin.**
4. Person is **breathing slowly** or irregularly. Usually this means less than 8 times per minute, or ten seconds (or more) between any two breaths.
5. Person **vomits while passed out** and does not wake up during or after.

What to do

1. **Don't hesitate** or worry about what the person will think when they sober up. It's your call. If you think he/she has suffered from alcohol poisoning, then do something!
2. **Put the person on their side in the recovery position.** In this position, a person who throws up will not choke on his/her own vomit.
3. **Call for help.** Dialing 911 is always a good bet. If you are near a hospital, get the person to an emergency room as fast as you can.
4. **Do not leave the person alone.** Carefully watch his/her breathing. If it stops, have a qualified person administer CPR.
5. **Stand by your decision.** Even if the person ends up not suffering from alcohol poisoning, stand up for your act of friendship. You did the right thing based on your judgment.

CONCORDIA STUDENTS AND ALCOHOL

A survey of over 250 Concordia students in March 2000 revealed that:

- **20% do not drink alcohol**
- **37% drink occasionally (less than once a month)**
- **19% drink at least one day a week**
- **For those students who do drink alcohol, the average amount of drinks that they have in a typical week is 3**

THE RECOVERY POSITION

1. While the person is on their back, raise the person's arm closest to you straight above their head. Straighten the leg closest to you. Bend the other leg at the knee and bring the other arm across the chest.
2. Gently roll the person towards you. Guard the head.
3. Tilt the head to maintain the airway open. Tuck nearest hand under the cheek to help maintain head tilt.



What to do if you think someone has a problem with alcohol

You may be concerned that a friend has a problem with alcohol, yet don't know how to approach them. The following suggestions may be helpful in such a situation:

- Try talking to the person. Be tactful. "I've noticed some changes in you. Are you having any problems?"
- Cite specific examples.
- Avoid sermons, lectures, and verbal attacks.
- Keep an open mind about how he/she evaluates his/her situation.
- Don't continue the conversation if you start getting impatient or angry.
- The person may respond defensively, deny having a problem, or agree they have a problem.

Dealing with Defensiveness:

- Make it clear that you dislike the behaviour, not the person.
- If you drink, be honest about your own drinking and attempts to control it.
- Understand that the person's defensiveness is based on fear of facing the problem and isn't directed at you.

Dealing with Denial:

- If your discussions have no effect, still tell the person how their problem is affecting you. For example, you can say how hard it is to have a good time for fear that the person will get sick, pass out, embarrass you, etc.

Dealing with Agreement:

- Why do you think you have a problem?
- What do you think you can do about it?
- What are you going to do about it?
- What kind of support do you need from me to help you stop or limit your drinking?

Setting Limits:

- You may need to set limits on what you will do with, or for, the problem drinker.
- Let your friend know what the limits are, and stick to them. For example, you may decide not to give your friend attention during or after drinking or not allow him/her to drink in your room or apartment.
- Limits, and sticking to them, are important particularly if your friend denies that he/she has problem.
- Don't be manipulated into hiding or dumping liquor, or covering for the drinker in front of family, dates, or other friends. Protecting or lying will not work; instead, it enables the drinker to continue the inappropriate behaviour.
- While it is important to be sensitive to your friend's needs, remember that you can't control your friend's life. At some point your responsibility ends. Don't feel guilty when you reach that point.

WAYS TO SAY NO TO A DRINK

The simplest answer in the book is to just say "NO THANKS" but here are some other suggestions:

C'mon, you're the only one who isn't drinking!

How's that for rugged individualism?

Can I fill your glass?

Yes, with water, thank you.

But I bought it for you!

But I didn't ask for it.

Just one more for the road.

For the road maybe, but not for me, thanks.

C'mon Joanne, have just one more.

Do guys still try to get girls drunk? I'll pass.

You're almost done, how about another?

I'm nursing a cold, so I'll just nurse what's left of this one, thanks.

Drink up! It's your turn to buy a round.

What is this? Beer pressure?

How about another?

As much as I'd like to, I know my head wouldn't appreciate it in the morning.

How about a drink?

No thanks, I'm driving.

Another round?

No thanks, I've reached my quota.

Tips for hosting a “responsible” party

Getting together with friends is fun, and hosting a party is a great way to be with friends. Alcohol is often a part of social gatherings. Although most people consume alcohol in moderation, there are steps you can take to prevent potential problems from alcohol at your party. Here are some suggestions:

- Don't drink too much yourself. You can stay on top of, and avoid, potential problems when you can think and act quickly and clearly. Enjoy alcohol in moderation.
- Take charge by setting "House Rules". Let your guests know that you want them all to have a great time and that you are taking measures for them to have a safe time as well. Let them also know that no one drives away from your party under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Post the "House Rules" where people will see them.
- If you are serving drinks, avoid an open bar. Mix the drinks yourself or have somebody in charge of mixing drinks. This way you can monitor the alcohol that your guests are consuming. Stop serving drinks at least an hour before the end of the party.
- Never 'push' drinks on your guests.
- Set up a key drop, where guests leave their keys with a designated person who will remain sober and hand back keys to those drivers who also remain sober. If you don't have a key drop, find out how your guests are getting home. **Be prepared to take keys away from those who should not drive.**
- Have available a number of ways for people to get home. This includes having designated drivers, posting the telephone numbers of taxi companies, and having some bus/metro tickets available along with bus schedules of routes nearby. You can access the STM website at <http://www.stm.info> for information on all bus routes.
- Be prepared for overnight guests with extra pillows, blankets, sleeping bags and mats.
- Always have sufficient amounts of alternative non-alcoholic beverages available such as juice, soda, coffee or mocktails (non-alcoholic cocktails).
- Plan alternative activities so that drinking does not become the main focus. Physical activities may not be the best idea since people can be more prone to injury or mishap when drinking.
- Serve food. People shouldn't drink on an empty stomach. High protein foods such as cheeses, meats, nuts and seafood delay the absorption of alcohol. Salty, greasy and sweet foods should be avoided since they increase thirst. Have some food available near the bar.
- Know the signs of impairment and alcohol poisoning. Be prepared to deal with such situations.

A FEW MOCKTAIL RECIPES

If you choose not to have alcohol yet feel more comfortable at a party with a drink in hand, here are some non-alcoholic options. You can make these for guests if you are hosting a party.

The Spare

- Over 3 ice cubes in a tall glass, pour 90 mL of orange juice and fill with soda water.
- Garnish with a half-moon slice of lemon and a slice of orange.

The Diabolic Piston

- Squeeze a quarter lemon into a 250 mL glass. Add ice cubes, salt and pepper, a dash of Worcestershire sauce and a drop of Tobasco sauce.
- Fill with tomato juice. Garnish with a lemon slice and a celery stick or straw.

Lemon Lovely

- Cover the bottom of a glass with ice cubes and add:
 - 15 mL lemon juice
 - equal parts of ginger ale and Seven Up to the brim.
- Garnish with a slice of lemon.

Sharon's Famous Shirley Temple

- 1 oz. grapefruit juice
- 1 oz. orange juice
- A few slices of lemon
- A few slices of orange
- Ginger ale to fill
- Dash grenadine
- Fill glass $\frac{1}{2}$ full of ice. Place fruit in glass. Pour ingredients directly into glass. Drizzle grenadine on top.

Mandarin Dream

- 3 oz. orange juice
- 3 oz. cranberry juice
- $\frac{1}{2}$ oz lemon juice
- $\frac{1}{2}$ oz maraschino cheery juice
- Shake above ingredients with ice. Pour into a glass with the ice. Garnish with a lime wedge (and a paper umbrella and straw, if you wish)

Cranberry Punch

- 1 litre pineapple juice
- 1 litre cranberry cocktail
- 1.5 litres Club soda
- Mix ingredients in a punch bowl with ice. Pour into glasses over ice cubes.