

The Truth About Alcohol

Alcohol is the most widely abused drug in the United States. However, many people tend to neglect alcohol as a drug since it has become accepted in society and a big part of our culture. Alcohol is seen everywhere, it is promoted heavily in sporting events and sports broadcasts (especially during the Super Bowl), and it is all over college campuses. Turning 21 years old has become a ritual by society to drink so much until you get sick and cannot remember anything you did the previous night. To make things worse, choosing not to drink has a negative social stigma attached to it—people think you are weird if you decide not to drink with them. Peter in his first epistle actually refers to this explicitly: "For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you" (1 Peter 4:3-4).

According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAA), approximately 5,000 young people under the age of 21 die as a result of un-

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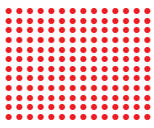
derage drinking each year. This includes about 1,900 deaths from motor vehicle crashes, 1,600 deaths as a result of homicides, 300 deaths from suicide, as well as hundreds from other injuries caused by people falling, burning themselves or drowning.

Excluding the fact that underage drinking is illegal if you are under 21 years old, long-term alcohol use can lead to serious damage to the liver, brain, stomach and the heart. Drinking too much (binge drinking) can lead to alcohol poisoning. In the most severe cases, alcohol abuse can result in a coma and sometimes death. It is important to note that not all alcohol-related problems are physical and that you do not have to be an alcoholic to experience them. A low level of alcohol in the bloodstream has a mild tranquilizing effect on the body since it is a central nervous system depressant. The first effects are exerted on the upper parts of the brain where learned behavior patterns are stored. This results in altered behavior such as reduced inhibitions and self-control, which usually leads to behavior that you would not otherwise do if you were not drunk, such as having sex or doing drugs.

One of the biggest misconceptions among college students (and future college students as well) is that you cannot have fun if you do not drink, which is ab-

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solutely not true. Though there is more to college than studying, drinking when you are not in class is not really the best way to grow spiritually. "Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy" (Romans 13:13). You should also know that those who tempt you to drink are not pleasing the Lord. "Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbor, pressing him to your bottle, even to make him drunk, that you may look on his nakedness" (Habakkuk 2:15).

Many people drink to escape from boredom or tension, reasons that usually lead to future drinking problems. If you drink when you are emotionally upset, under stress, or even tired it can have a stronger impact on the body than normal. Drinking to overcome problems in your life is often the first step towards alcohol dependence. If you have a relative in your family who was or still is an alcoholic, you may have a genetic predisposition towards addiction, giving you all the more reason not to drink.

There are other consequences to underage drinking to consider. Many universities and colleges are adopting strict alcohol and drug policies. At the University of Georgia, getting caught drinking alcohol underage means being put on probation for the rest of the semester as well as for an additional two more semesters. In addition, violators of the policy have to take a mandatory alcohol awareness course as well as have their parents notified by the school. Another offense or a violation of the probation means suspension for that student.

Probably one of the worst decisions you can make in your life is to drink and drive. It does not matter if your blood-alcohol level is below the legal limit, driving under the influence can lead to a car accident and having your driving license revoked. In the worst cases, driving when you are drunk can lead to death of an innocent driver, a passenger, or even your own life.

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What many people do not realize is that you do not have to be an alcoholic to have a drinking problem. It is not uncommon for young adults to be physically or emotionally dependent on alcohol, especially when it is so widely available on college-campuses. It is quite easy to develop a drinking problem at a young age. "Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may follow intoxicating drink; who continue until night, till wine inflames them" (Isaiah 5:11).

Myths about Drinking

Drinking is good for your health.

Many people tend to bring up the various medical benefits of having a drink or two a day. It is true that research has suggested that moderate drinking can increase insulin sensitivity, which can reduce the risk of diabetes, among other things. But it is important to point out that the empty calories in alcohol can be a problem, as there is a link between type 2 diabetes and excess weight. However, the other benefits of modest alcohol use (like lower risk of heart disease) can be equated to the effects of a small daily dose of baby aspirin (about 81 mg per day) or eating a small amount of nuts. Certain grape juices have also been shown to have the same similar effects. But taking an aspirin, having a few nuts or drinking grape juice do not lead to impaired judgment or bad actions that you may regret or will have to live with for the rest of your life.

Drinking is not a sin.

Yes it is true that drinking is not a sin, but being drunk is and God clearly states



what will happen to drunkards in the end. "Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:10) and "Envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:21).

The Bible only refers to wine.

Some people tend to argue that the Bible is outdated, and only refers to wine and not the various alcoholic beverages available today. However, even in the Old Testament this Lord distinctly clarifies between both wine and intoxicating drinks: "Do not drink wine or intoxicating drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations" (Leviticus 10:9).

Jesus drank wine.

Both Christians as well as non-Christians argue that it is okay to drink wine and alcohol, since Jesus drank wine at the Wedding of Cana of Galilee. That is completely false, as it is nowhere mentioned in the Bible that Jesus drank wine. The Lord was also falsely accused by the Pharisees to be a "glutton and a winebibber": "The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'" (Luke 7:34).

The best thing you can do now is to make the commitment not to drink. You do not have to give into peer pressure. For a lot of people, alcohol is an important aspect to their social activities. If you find yourself in situations like these and cannot handle the pressure, then it is better to avoid them than to drink with them. If you are afraid that your friends will not like if you do not drink with them then they are obviously not real friends to begin with. Stand up for what you

believe in and who you are. If you know someone or one of your friends has a drinking problem, help them. Talk to them about it or consider getting a Sunday School teacher or your priest involved if they are a member of the church. You can also lead by example—show people that you can have fun without drinking.

"And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18).

Sources: University of Miami Counseling Center, National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, Welch Foods, Principle and Labs for Fitness and Wellness, and the University of Georgia.

