

ALCOHOL

It is possible to drink legally and safely when a person is 21 or older and drinks in fairly small amounts. But if you're under 21, or if you drink too much at any age, alcohol can be especially risky.

Some of the dangers of underage drinking include:

- Death

Every year, about 5,000 minors die from alcohol related injuries. Alcohol is a contributing factor in four out of every 10 deaths from car accidents, drowning, burns, falls, and other accidental injuries.

- Addiction

The younger you are when you start drinking alcohol, the greater your chance of becoming addicted at some point later in life. More than four in 10 people who start drinking before they turn 15 eventually become alcoholics.

- Thinking Problems

The brain is still developing during the teen-age years. Research done on teens with alcohol disorders show that heavy drinking during the teen years is linked with memory and learning problems.

- Arrest

Drinking under the age of 21 is illegal. ANY trace of alcohol in your body could mean that you won't get a drivers license or it could be taken away. You could also lose your job or college scholarship.

Drinking too soon or too much can affect your frame of mind and the way you think. It could cause you to hurt yourself or others, get you into legal trouble or damage your relationships. Too much alcohol can damage your body now and when you grow up. Worst of all, you can get hooked.

Some people drink alcohol to feel less tense or anxious and more relaxed. However, heavier drinking can turn good feelings into bad and bad feelings into worse. Since alcohol affects memory, people sometimes don't remember feeling bad. People who drink heavily often wind up doing things they really didn't want to do. They end up in accidents, fights, and other bad situations that ham property, other people and themselves. Heavy drinking also deadens feeling and makes it much harder for men to have an erection and women to reach orgasm.

When people drink too much, with time they risk becoming addicted to alcohol. This is

called alcoholism, or alcohol dependence. It's a disease, and it can happen at any age. Common signs include:

- **Cravings** - a strong need or urge to drink
- **Lack of control** - not being able to stop or cut down drinking
- **Not feeling well after drinking** - upset stomach, sweating, shakiness, nervousness
- **Desire to drink more** - to get the same effect as before
- **Ignoring activities** - giving up or cutting back on other activities
- **Continuing to drink** - even though alcohol is causing problems

It may be hard to imagine why people with alcoholism can't just "use a little willpower" to stop drinking. The addiction creates an uncontrollable need for alcohol. It can be as strong as the need for food and water. People may want to stop because they know that drinking harms their health and their loved ones. But quitting is extremely difficult. Although some people are able to recover from alcoholism without help, many need assistance. With treatment and support, many stop drinking and rebuild their lives.

Here are some web sites with additional information about alcohol:

<http://www.mcg.edu/shs/sexalcho.htm>

http://www.netdoctor.co.uk/sex_relationships/facts/sexalcohol.htm

http://sexuality.about.com/od/sexualhealthqanda/a/alcohol_and_sex.htm

<http://www.factsontap.org/factsontap/risky/index.htm>

<http://parentsempowered.org/>