

# Alcohol



Alcohol is a commonly used drug. There are two different types of alcohol. Ethyl alcohol (or ethanol) is made when vegetables, fruits and grains break down and go through a chemical process called fermentation. This type of alcohol is found in alcoholic drinks such as beer, wine, hard liquor or spirits. Methyl alcohol (or methanol) is found in household and industrial products like antifreeze and paint removers. This type of alcohol is poisonous to drink.

Most people that drink alcohol do so in moderation. Alcohol is sometimes consumed with meals, used in social gatherings and as part of celebrations. However, drinking too much alcohol or drinking alcohol too often may affect the quality of your life.

## What is a standard drink?

A standard drink can help you monitor and track how much alcohol you are drinking or planning on drinking.

Each of the drinks pictured is considered a standard drink. They have different strengths of alcohol (from

5% alcohol per volume to 40% alcohol per volume) and are served in different sizes of containers (from 1.5 oz to 12 oz), but they are all equal in terms of alcohol content. Knowing this definition can help you make informed decisions about the amount of alcohol you consume.

## Short-Term Effects

Alcohol slows your brain activity and impairs the way you think, speak and move. When you drink too much alcohol, you may make poor decisions and do things that you would not normally do. You may have slurred speech, blurred vision and trouble

## Standard Drink

Each of these drinks has the same amount of alcohol.



Beer

12 oz | 5%  
(341ml) alc/vol

=



Hard Liquor

1.5 oz | 40%  
(43ml) alc/vol

=



Wine

5 oz | 12%  
(142ml) alc/vol

=



Hard Liquor

1.5 oz | 40%  
(43ml) alc/vol

=



Cooler

12 oz | 5%  
(341ml) alc/vol

**NOTE:** This material is for information only and should not replace advice from an Addictions or Mental Health Counsellor, doctor or other health care provider.

walking. As you drink more alcohol, these effects worsen. Drinking too much alcohol can cause a *hangover* eight to 12 hours after you stop drinking. You may feel tired and experience headaches, nausea, shakiness, diarrhea and vomiting.

Heavy or binge drinking can be very dangerous and increases your chances of being injured. It may cause you to *blackout* (you are not able to remember what was said or done while drinking) or *pass-out* (you become unconscious). For suggestions on how to lower your risk of harm, see the *national low risk drinking guidelines* at [ccsa.ca](http://ccsa.ca).

If a person has been drinking heavily and is unconscious, lay that person on his/her side and stay with him/her. Never leave an unconscious person alone. Look for signs of alcohol poisoning such as clammy skin, low body temperature, and slow and laboured breathing. If a person has these symptoms, call 911 for medical help.

## Long-Term Effects

Drinking one standard drink of alcohol every day can increase your risk of illness. As the number of drinks you consume each day increases, your risk also increases. Drinking heavy amounts of alcohol over a long period of time may lead to chronic health conditions and health problems such as liver and brain damage, heart disease, stomach ulcers, sexual problems and some types of cancer.

### How does it work?

When you drink alcohol, it passes through your stomach, small intestine, into your bloodstream and to other parts of your body such as your brain. Alcohol stays in your body until your liver can break it down. The effect of the alcohol on your body depends on several factors including: your age, gender, body size, how much alcohol you are used to drinking, how quickly you drink, and the amount and type of food in your stomach.

## Alcohol and Dependency

If frequent drinking, heavy drinking and *hangovers* are affecting the quality of your life, it may indicate problem drinking or alcohol dependence. You can become psychologically dependent on alcohol (you *feel* you need it) and physically dependent (your *body*

needs it). When you become physically dependent on alcohol, you become tolerant to the alcohol's effects – in other words, more alcohol is needed in order for you to feel the effects of the alcohol.

If you are physically dependent, you may have withdrawal symptoms when you stop drinking. Withdrawal symptoms may be mild such as sleeplessness, tremors and nausea or more severe such as hallucinations, fever, racing heart, seizures, and even death.

### Did you know...

- › Drinking alcohol at any time during pregnancy may affect an unborn baby. If you think you may be pregnant, are planning on becoming pregnant or are breastfeeding, drinking alcohol is not recommended.
- › Mixing alcohol and drugs (prescribed or illegal ones) can be very dangerous. The alcohol may decrease the effectiveness of a drug or may dangerously increase its effect on the body.
- › Females and males of the same body type and weight will typically become intoxicated at different rates. This is because a male's body has more water and the alcohol becomes more diluted, compared to a female's body.

## Who can you contact if you need help regarding alcohol use?

Contact your local Addictions/Mental Health Services office, doctor or other health care provider if you need more information. To locate Addictions/Mental Health Services near you, here are some options:

- visit [healthysask.ca](http://healthysask.ca);
- check the green pages of your phone book for your local health region's services;
- visit HealthLine Online at [healthlineonline.ca](http://healthlineonline.ca); or
- contact HealthLine at 811 and ask to speak to an Addictions or Mental Health Counsellor.

