



## ... On your Health

### Alcohol

Alcohol goes directly into the bloodstream, physically affecting the whole body. Some illnesses and health problems caused by alcohol include:

- **Hangovers.** Headaches, nausea, vomiting, aches and pains all result from drinking too much. Drinking to the point of drunkenness makes you sick.
- **Weight gain.** Alcohol is not water. A beer has about 150 "empty" calories that provide few if any nutrients.
- **High blood pressure.** Along with being overweight, high blood pressure is associated with many serious health problems.
- **Depressed immune system.** Impaired immunity makes you more likely to contract viral illnesses such as flu and infections.
- **Cancer.** 2-4% of all cancer cases are related to alcohol. Upper digestive tract cancers are the most common, hitting the esophagus, mouth, larynx, and pharynx. Women who drink prior to menopause are more likely to develop breast cancer. Your risk of skin cancer doubles if you drink slightly more than "moderate levels." Some studies implicate alcohol in colon, stomach, pancreas and lung cancer. And let's not forget the liver...
- **Liver disease.** Heavy drinking can cause fatty liver, hepatitis, cirrhosis and cancer of the liver. The liver breaks down alcohol at the rate of only one drink per hour.
- **Alcohol poisoning.** Drinking large amounts can result in alcohol poisoning, which causes unconsciousness and even death. Breathing slows, and the skin becomes cold and may look blue. Don't let a person in this condition "sleep it off." Call 911.
- **Heart or respiratory failure.** Excessive drinking can have serious results. Heart or respiratory failure often means death.



Other long-term effects of heavy alcohol use include loss of appetite, vitamin deficiencies, stomach ailments, sexual impotence, central nervous system damage, and memory loss.

Finally, let's not forget **alcoholism**. Alcoholism is a disease to which some people seem predisposed. Alcoholics are unable to control their drinking--how much, when, and if. Alcoholism puts you at great risk for other health problems, and it can shorten your life by more than 10 years. Alcoholism cannot be cured, but it can be treated. Through education, treatment, and self-help support such as AA, people can learn to live alcohol-free and feel good.

### **But I heard drinking was good for my health!**

Many of the above links are provided through the Center for Substance Abuse Research, University of Maryland, and the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA).

### Drugs

