



SELF-HELP NOTES
UI COUNSELING & TESTING CENTER
CONTINUING EDUCATION BLDG, 306, 885-6716



COLLEGE WOMEN AND DRINKING

A decision most college women make is if, and how much alcohol, they will drink during their college experience. Having important and accurate information can help with that decision.

Drinking affects women differently than men. Knowing how alcohol affects you as a woman can help you make more responsible, safer choices about drinking.

There are times and ways to drink that are safer than others. Every woman's body responds differently to alcohol. Making responsible choices about alcohol consumption means knowing how alcohol affects you.

How does alcohol affect a woman's body?

- The way a person reacts to alcohol depends on many factors; including gender, weight, rate of alcohol intake, strength of drink, drug use, and mood.
- As alcohol enters the body it is absorbed directly into the bloodstream through the walls of the stomach. The more water available in the body, the more distributed the alcohol. Women have less body fluid and more body fat than men. As a result, the concentration of alcohol in a woman's blood will be higher than that of a man's.
- Weight affects the distribution of alcohol through the blood stream. The smaller the person, the less distributed the alcohol is in the body, making the alcohol less diluted when reaching the brain.
- Women's bodies oxidize alcohol differently than men. A woman's body's ability to oxidize alcohol is affected by her menstrual cycle. This means a woman can get intoxicated more quickly than usual around her menstrual cycle.
- Women have less of the enzyme dehydrogenase, which breaks down alcohol in the stomach. This means a woman absorbs more alcohol in her blood, resulting in higher levels of intoxication than a man.
- Drinking alcohol while taking certain medications can cause health problems. There are some medications that should not be mixed with alcohol. Mixing alcohol and medications can affect the effectiveness of the medication.
- Generally, the concentration of alcohol in a woman's blood is higher than that of a man's, resulting in a greater degree of intoxication and impairment.
- Being a responsible drinker means knowing the risks, to you and others, associated with high risk drinking.

Consequences of unsafe drinking

- A woman's risk of violent and sexual assault increases with the use of alcohol.
- Unwanted sexual advances and unplanned, unsafe sex are more likely to occur to women who drink.
- Driving after/while drinking increases a woman's risk of being in an accident.
- The number of women drivers involved in alcohol-related accidents or fatal traffic crashes is increasing.
- Heavy alcohol consumption is known to result in memory deficits, impacting a woman's academic performance.

- Alcohol use dramatically compromises immune responses, weakening a woman's ability to fight infections and tumors.
- Heavy alcohol consumption may also increase the risk for Alzheimer's disease as a woman ages.
- Mild to moderate alcohol use may also affect a woman's reproductive functioning.
- Chronic alcohol use impacts the health of a woman's bones, resulting in a weakening of the bones' mechanical structure. This becomes more important as a woman ages.
- Women tend to develop alcohol-induced liver disease and damage over a shorter period of time and after consuming less alcohol than men.
- Women are more likely to develop alcohol hepatitis and die from cirrhosis of the liver.
- Women are twice as likely to die from alcohol-related disease (female alcoholics have death rates 50 to 100 percent higher than those of male alcoholics).
- As a result of consuming alcohol, women have an increased risk of dying from suicide, alcohol-related accidents, heart disease, and stroke.

Know how much you are drinking

- A standard drink is:
 - 12 oz beer (at 4% alcohol)
 - 4 oz wine (at 12% alcohol)
 - 1.5 oz hard liquor (at 80 proof)
- Any standard drink contains the same amount of alcohol. Generally, a 120 lb woman's blood alcohol level is raised 0.02% per standard drink.

How much is too much?

- Drinking becomes "too much" when it causes or elevates the risk for alcohol-related problems.
- Women who drink 3 or more standard drinks in a day (or 7 or more per week) and men who drink 4 or more standard drinks in a day (or 14 or more per week) are at increased risk for alcohol-related problems.
- Remember, individual responses to alcohol vary. Drinking at lower levels may still cause problems given certain factors. Know how alcohol affects you.

How do you know if you have a problem with drinking?

- Answer the following four questions to help you answer this question:
 - 1) Have you felt you should cut down on your drinking?
 - 2) Have people annoyed you by criticizing your drinking?
 - 3) Have you ever felt bad or guilty about your drinking?
 - 4) Have you ever had a drink first thing in the morning to steady your nerves or to get rid of a hangover?
- Answering "yes" to one of these four questions suggests you may have an alcohol problem. We recommend you ask advice from a counselor or health care provider and discuss your responses to these questions.

Need Additional Help?

The University of Idaho Counseling & Testing Center offers free individual and group counseling for these and related issues for full time UI students. For more information or to schedule an appointment, call the Counseling & Testing Center (Mary E. Forney Hall, Rm. 306, 1210 Blake Ave.) at 208-885-6716.

Website: www.uidaho.edu/ctc

All appointments are strictly confidential.