

## **Absolut Reality: Alcohol**

*Want to know more about alcohol? Feel free to contact Erin Morgan, Coordinator of Alcohol & Drug Education Programs, at 503-5195 to schedule a workshop for your class, organization, or group.*

- **Facts and Stats**

- Approximately 1700 college students die every year from alcohol-related accidents (up from 1400 in 2002).
- More than 70,000 college-age students are raped or sexually assaulted each year as a result of alcohol.
  - College-age women are more likely to be raped than any other group and are less likely to report it.
- More than 600,000 college students a year are assaulted by another student who has been drinking.
- As many as 360,000 of today's college students will eventually die of alcohol-related causes.
  - Sadly, at this time, this is more than the number that will go on to receive graduate degrees.
- One night of heavy drinking can impair a person's ability to think abstractly for up to 30 days.
- Alcohol increases the risk of dropping out or failing.
  - As the number of drinks consumed per week increases, GPA decreases.
- **Reality Tip:** Alcohol **use** on college campuses is alcohol **abuse** in the real world.
- 66% of USC Upstate Students drink moderately or not at all (significantly higher than the National Average).
- 78% of USC Upstate Students choose not to drive if they have been drinking (significantly higher than the National Average).

- **What Really Is One Drink?**

- Research indicates that most people, especially adolescents and young adults, underestimate how much they drink due to a lack of knowledge about standard drink sizes/amounts.
- One standard drink is approximately:
  - One 12-ounce beer
  - One 4-ounce glass of wine
  - One 1-ounce shot of liquor (80 proof)
- **Reality Tip:** In restaurants and bars, "one drink" is usually more than what really is one standard drink as a result of glass types and sizes.
- Many "mixed drinks" have several different liquors in them and are, therefore, equivalent to more than one standard drink
  - One "Long Island Ice Tea" can be equivalent to three or more standard drinks.

- **A Few Words About Metabolism**

- Metabolism is the process by which alcohol (or any other substance) is chemically broken down for elimination from the body.
- The liver is the primary site for metabolism of alcohol.

- Many young adults consume more (sometimes much more) alcohol than the body is able to metabolize, often because they are unaware of how much the body can really handle. This explains why it is common to hear, “I **only** had 3 drinks but I felt **so** intoxicated”. It also explains why some people accidentally overdose on alcohol.
  - The rate of metabolism varies from about ¼ ounce to 1 ounce of alcohol per hour. It is typically a little less than ½ ounce per hour.
    - Variations in the rate of metabolism are due to genetics, age, sex, illness, previous drinking history, weight, and the amount of food in the stomach.
  - **Reality Tip:** In general, a safe rule of thumb is one (standard) drink per hour.
  - **Reality Tip:** Carbonation actually speeds up the rate at which alcohol is absorbed into the bloodstream.....so, having a straight shot of liquor is actually less risky than mixing it with a soft drink (i.e. “Jack & Coke”)!
- **Binge Drinking**
    - Binge drinking is defined as approximately 5 consecutive drinks for a man and 4 consecutive drinks for a woman (consecutive = in 1 sitting).
    - Because of the rate at which it is metabolized, the body struggles to deal with large amounts of alcohol.
      - Drinking a large amount (5/4 or more) at one time can lead to alcohol poisoning or overdose, which can cause serious health problems or death.
    - **Reality Tip:** Avoid drinking games and alternate alcoholic with nonalcoholic drinks. Also, be sure to eat before and during drinking and to avoid drinking altogether if you are sick and/or or taking any medication.
- **Tolerance**
    - Tolerance is the measure of the degree of impairment at a given Blood Alcohol Level. As people drink more and more, the body adapts to the amount of alcohol and becomes more tolerant of it (tolerance goes up). By nature, the brain must adapt to changing environments in order to survive.
    - A small increase in tolerance can occur in just one night of heavy drinking.
    - As tolerance goes up, people feel that they can “handle” more alcohol. This seems like a good thing and often makes people feel like they have less risk. In reality, however, by the time people become aware that they are not “handling it”, it is probably too late to prevent a problem.
      - People often use physical impairments (i.e. slurred speech, difficulty walking, tunnel vision, vomiting) to judge whether or not they are handling the alcohol, however it is the mental impairments and higher brain functions that usually cause the accidents and injuries.
      - Tolerance has the biggest effect on physical impairments, meaning that it takes longer for the physical impairments to appear. (As tolerance goes up, there is a greater gap between mental impairment and physical impairment.)
    - High tolerance makes people less sensitive to alcohol, making them less aware of how impaired they really are.
    - High tolerance is a sign of alcohol dependence.

- **You Asked, We Tell: Warning Signs of Alcohol Overdose – How to Help A Friend**
  - The most frequently asked questions related to alcohol on college campuses are “How do I know if someone has overdosed” and “How do I help someone who has overdosed”.
    - Try to wake the person. Does the person remain unconscious and unable to respond?
    - Listen to the person’s breathing. Is it slow, irregular, or shallow (less than 8 breaths per minute and/or more than 10 seconds between breaths)?
    - Check the person’s skin. Is it cold, clammy, pale, or bluish color?
    - If you can, check the person’s pulse. Does it feel much faster or slower than your own?
    - If the answer to one or more of these questions is yes:
      - Immediately call 911.
      - Ensure that the person is lying on his/her side to prevent choking.
      - Stay with the person until help arrives. (**Reality Tip:** Under the “Good Samaritan” law you will not get in trouble if you are helping someone who has overdosed – even if you too are intoxicated.)
  
- **There is a lot of information out there about alcohol. To find out more about these topics and others, contact Erin Morgan at 503-5195.**
  - Blood Alcohol Level (BAL) information
  - Drink refusal skills and how to “party” without partaking
  - Phases of use and dependence/addiction
  - How genetics/family history plays a role in abuse and dependence
  - The dreaded hangover
  - Social host responsibility
  - Laws and sanctions around alcohol use

### **Additional Information**

- Check out these low-key and humorous ways to [decline a drink](#)
- As drinks go up, GPA goes down. See it [here](#)!
- For more comprehensive information about alcohol use and statistics, visit the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) [InfoFacts](#).
- Thinking about cutting back on your drinking? If so, [click here](#) for some helpful information on how to do it.
- Check out this interactive [Blood Alcohol Level calculator](#).
- Visit [this page](#) for information about SC laws around alcohol and drug use.