

It's not a big deal to ask for help. But it sure is a shame to ignore a problem.



Probably the best-known problem any of us associates with drinking is the disease known as *alcoholism*.

Everybody knows what alcoholism is, but nobody really seems able to define it very well. We'll just call it a state of dependence on alcohol that causes a variety of physical and emotional problems.

Still, why worry about alcoholism? You're young, right?

That's good enough for starters, right there. Researchers say that the number of young people currently affected by alcoholism is higher than it's ever been.



Hangover helper. Cold showers don't work; coffee doesn't, either. The only thing that stops a hangover is time.

Some estimate that at least a million teens and young adults in the United States display at least some of the warning signs of alcoholism, while many more are problem drinkers.

What *are* the warning signs?

Common ones include blackouts (periods of total or near-complete amnesia while drunk), frequent heavy drinking, and morning drinking, and a laundry

list of drinking-related personal problems.

What do you do if *you've* got a problem?

Get help.

It's as available as a telephone call to a local counseling center or alcohol treatment program. And if *that* still sounds too complicated, just call information and ask for "AA."

Just remember, it's not a big deal to ask for help. But it's a shame to ignore a problem as big as booze can be.

Why worry?

So where does all this leave us? Smarter, if not wiser—and hopefully, in a better position to consider alcohol and its place in our lives.

If you drink, and statistics and common sense show that you will at one time or another, be careful in the *way* you drink.



Don't drink to escape problems and don't drink and drive, because driving drunk is a choice that no one has a right to make.

If you don't drink, don't feel embarrassed or out of it because of it. You're making a smart choice.

Just don't feel like you have to be *hero* because of it—though sometimes it works out that way, too.

If you're still not sure what to do, think about the points we've raised and then decide whether or not drinking is something you want in your life at the moment.

Because there's one thing more important than *what* you choose about booze, and that's *that* you choose—that *you* choose and not let others decide for you or let the automatic pilot in your head do what seems easiest.

And when you *do* choose, remember this: The only thing you just *gotta* have to be happy is yourself, under your own control. And if you've got that, you just plain can't lose, booze or no booze. ■



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choice remarks

The Basics & Beyond BOOZE



Everybody's got a favorite drinking story. How about the time Tom Collins chugged Gatorade and gin on the game bus to Springfield and blew lunch?

Yuck-yuck! Way to go, Collins!

Or the time Brandi Alexander sloshed down an entire pint of vodka with cokes at Nestor's Neutron Burger, then passed out in the locked rest room and had to be rescued by firemen? *Smooth move, Brandi! (Not!)*

Everybody's got a favorite drunk, too.

How about Dudley Moore in "Arthur?" Or Nicholas Cage in "Leaving Las Vegas?" W.C. Fields and Dean Martin practically made *careers* out of being plastered—or pretending to be.

And what about jokes? Ever hear the line that you're not *really* drunk if you can lie down on the floor without holding on?



Booze light special. Nicholas Cage in his Academy Award-winning portrayal of a suicidal drunk in "Leaving Las Vegas."

Or how about the one where the drunk loses his car keys and looks for them on the other side of the street because the light's better there? *Budda-boom!*

Still, when you stop and think about it, you realize that booze, and the problems it can cause,

isn't funny. In fact, according to 2007 research, 17.6 million people in America have serious drinking problems.

And at least 16,000 Americans will die this year in traffic accidents caused by drunk drivers.

You get a better idea of how unfunny booze can be when you look at it objectively, and not get sucked in by all the ads that try to make it look cool to chill out with a couple of tall ones before (and after) everything.

Because the fact is that alcohol *is* a drug—one of the most potentially dangerous drugs we know of. And just as with other drugs, we're learning more and more about it all the time.

In this pamphlet we're going to talk about what alcohol is, how it works, and how it affects people.

And while the facts that we'll be talking about aren't all *that* funny, they *are* true.

And they're *definitely* worth considering when it comes time to choose about booze.

warstories

It's fermentation that puts the kick in liquor and the cheer in beer. The problem is that it also lights the fuse in booze.



Alcohol has helped to grease the wheels of life on earth for quite a while now. In fact, some anthropologists believe that agriculture, the first activity that humans performed which paved the way for civilization, grew out of our thirst for alcohol as much as our hunger for food.

They think that our ancestors got into farming not just to grow food (they could *find* that in a lot of places), but to insure a steady supply of ingredients needed for batches of prehistoric home-brew.



Early origins. Alcohol's been a part of human culture since there's been a human culture.

Somehow, early cave folk deduced that the juice that collected when grapes or other fruit sat a while was *way* different from ordinary juice.

It had more of a kick, for one thing.

And when they drank it, early people acted differently, too.

They were less afraid of the local saber-toothed tiger, for example—and more likely to press the issue, if they had a club handy.

What made the juice different—and what we know now triggers the effects we associate with drinking—was the process of *fermentation*.

It's what happens when the sugars in fruits or grains are converted into alcohol molecules.

Early humans may not have looked smart, and they may not have completely understood the process at first, but they stayed with it and their descendants gradually came to learn that the lowly yeast cell, which occurs naturally on the skins of grapes and other fruits, is the key to the fermentation process.

And it's fermentation, we know, that puts the kick in liquor and the cheer in beer.

The problem is that it also lights the fuse in booze.

first facts

The fuse in booze that really makes things confused is the chemical *ethanol*, or ethyl alcohol.

Ethanol is just one type of alcohol, but it's the only one that can be safely consumed by humans. Other forms include *methyl* and *butyl* alcohol, which are toxic poisons and used mostly in medical and industrial products, like rubbing alcohol and antifreeze.

That doesn't mean that ethanol *isn't* poisonous—it is. It's just *less* toxic than its chemical cousins. It can cause the same problems, even coma or death, at higher dosage levels.

So how do you measure a particular drink's alcohol potency—and potential toxicity? By the percentage of pure ethanol present.

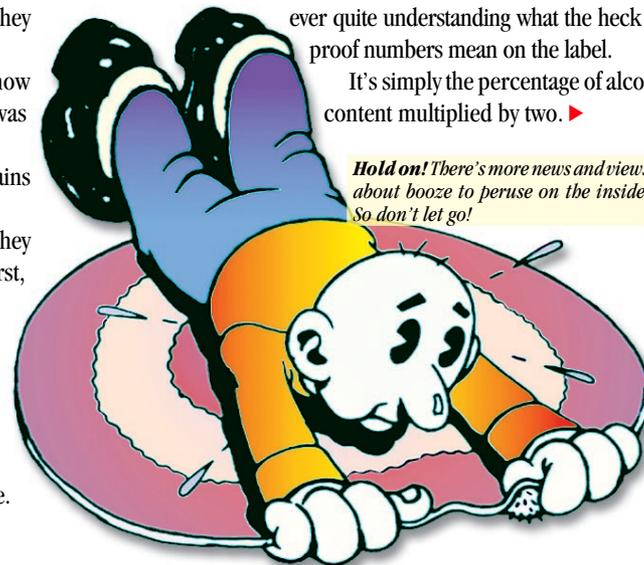
In the case of beer and wine, alcohol content is expressed as a simple percentage. With liquor, though, the numbers are measured in something called *proof*.

What's proof?

That's a good question with an easy answer, but some drinkers drink their whole lives (literally) without ever quite understanding what the heck the proof numbers mean on the label.

It's simply the percentage of alcohol content multiplied by two. ▶

Hold on! There's more news and views about booze to peruse on the inside. So don't let go!



boozebasics

The rest of the swallow goes where other swallows go (and we don't mean Capistrano).



To find the percentage of ethanol in liquor, do the opposite and divide the proof by two. This means that 86-proof whiskey is 43 percent alcohol, and 100 proof vodka is 50 percent alcohol.

The places you're most likely to bump into ethanol, measured in proof or percentage, are inside bottles of beer, wine and liquor. How much is in each? Let's peek inside:

■ **Beer** ranges in alcohol content from 3.2 to 6 percent, with most U.S. beers averaging about 4.5 percent ("light" beers less).

■ **Wine** contains 9-14 percent alcohol, although certain types (which are "fortified" with extra alcohol) can hit 20 percent. Like light beer, wine coolers pack less punch, ounce per ounce. (Though they *can* get you just as drunk, if you work at it.)

■ **Liquor** is a concentrated form of alcohol produced by distilling already-fermented alcohol. The ethanol content of most liquors (or "distilled spirits") ranges from 40-50 percent, although some so-called "neutral spirits" can hit 95 percent.

Regardless of the form it comes in, once booze is out of the bottle and in someone's system, it's all basically the same stuff.

That's because a beer contains roughly the same amount of alcohol as a shot of liquor or a glass of wine. The line between "hard liquor" and beer and wine is mostly imaginary; beer and wine contain more water, that's all.

Okay. Now we're at a place where things get interesting: tracking what alcohol does in the body. And getting alcohol into the body is what an awful lot of people spend an *awful* lot of their time trying to do.

What happens when they succeed?

Let's take a look, and follow a typical swallow along a typical tangle of human physiology.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves, because some alcohol is absorbed *before* it's swallowed. That's because small amounts enter the bloodstream on contact with the lining of the mouth and throat. This instant intake zips to the brain, and produces a drink's earliest effects.

The rest of the swallow goes where all swallows go—and we don't mean Capistrano. Since alcohol isn't digested, what sloshes into the stomach is either absorbed through its lining or passes on into the intestines, where it filters into the bloodstream. From there, ethanol races to all body organs and tissues, including the brain.

How long the ethanol remains active, though, is a function of body *metabolism* and the rate it's broken down by the liver.

Since the liver burns off alcohol at a fixed rate (about an ounce of 100-proof liquor an hour), slurping down more causes profound change in both body and mind.

Are we manipulated yet? In case you somehow missed it, sexual imagery is often employed to sell alcohol, as in the altered beer ads at left and right. Know why? because it works. You noticed them (and read this) didn't you?

booze & the body

This change is known informally by a lot of names (see the Top 10 list at right, if you need help), but scientifically by one: *intoxication*.

Signs of mild intoxication include decreased inhibitions, impaired concentration and coordination, and increased relaxation. Slurred speech, staggering, and serious impairment—even death—can occur at progressively higher levels, as toxic effects pile up.

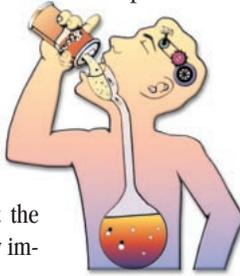
Since alcohol is eliminated at a fixed rate, several factors determine how much a person is affected.

One is body size. This means that a small person drinking the same amount as a bigger person feels the effects more. Why? Pound for pound, there's more alcohol in his or her system.

Another factor is drinking *rate*. A person who chugs three or four beers gets hit harder than someone who sips the same amount over a longer period.

Why? Because the liver enzymes that metabolize alcohol become saturated, and the unprocessed booze just keeps banging into the brain.

When blood alcohol reaches a certain level (0.08 percent throughout the U.S. since 2004), a drinker is legally impaired. At higher levels, a drinker's drunker. At still higher levels, a drinker's dead drunk—and sometimes dead, period.



Inedible journey. Drinking is like a game of controlled toxicity the body plays with itself. But don't expect to always win.

Absorption is also influenced by other factors, including gender and whether a drinker drinks on a full or empty stomach. Alcohol is absorbed faster on an empty stomach, so it's a good idea to eat something while drinking, if you want to stay sober.

Still, the main point is simple: If you drink booze faster than your liver can metabolize it, you get drunk. Inevitably.

And when you're drunk, the only thing that sobers you up is time.

Now that we've taken a look at what booze does in the body, let's look at what it does in the mind, and consider *why* people drink.

The two issues are pretty closely linked. Because the main reasons people give when they're asked *why* they drink involve psychological payoffs they say they get from booze: to relax and feel less self-conscious, to fit in or be sociable, or express themselves better.

But if you look deeper, you see something else under-

whys, guys

Drinking and unsafe sex go together like, well, unsafe sex and AIDS. Drinkers don't see what all the fuss is about and, besides, they're invulnerable anyway, right?



neath, and find such unacknowledged reasons as depression, loneliness, low self-esteem, and other problems.

And that's worth thinking about, because something that researchers have consistently noted over the years is that people who drink to escape problems or pump up their self-confidence are more likely to become problem drinkers.

And problem drinking creates even **bigger** problems.

Then there's sex. It may just be the biggest unacknowledged reason for drinking of all. As American humorist Ogden Nash pointed out a long time ago ("Candy is dandy, but liquor is quicker"), alcohol *can* work wonders in turning a simple attraction into a serious affair.

The problem is that it can also turn a night out into a nightmare. Just ask the tens of thousands of young people who turned into young parents last year, when normal sex drives got even more inflamed with alcohol.

And if you don't believe *them*, ask the thousands of kids who get caught up every year in allegations of date rape: *He* says she was asking for it. *She* says she was only asking him to stop.

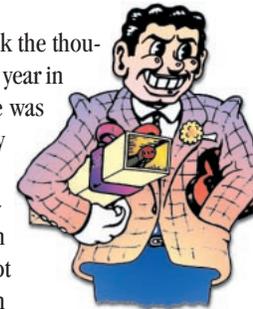
Alcohol's ability to deflate inhibitions as it inflates desire hasn't been lost on advertisers, either—at least not those willing to capitalize on human weakness and insecurities, which includes most of them.

That's why beer commercials have traditionally been among the most sexually-oriented ads on American TV.

Advertisers pull out all the stops—in the form of giggles and wiggles at bars and on beaches—to sell lonely people on a single idea: Drink our beer and you might get lucky. *These guys did.*

The problem is that drinkers usually *don't* get lucky—and even when they do, they don't. Because studies show that drinking and unsafe sex go together like, well, unsafe sex and AIDS.

Drinkers just don't see what all the fuss is about and, besides, they're invulnerable anyway, right?



Love is strange...But drinking can make it stranger, still.

A final item to consider in reviewing the relationship between sex and alcohol is something Shakespeare noted hundreds of years ago, when he pointed out that alcohol "provokes the desire but it takes away the performance."

Scientific studies and clinical reports bear out the Bard's conclusion, as do problem drinkers themselves, who often report sexual problems, ranging from impotence and frigidity to outright deterioration of the sexual organs.

Need any *other* motivation not to get blasted on a regular basis?

Since you asked (You *were* thinking about asking, weren't you?), there are a few more reasons to avoid problem drinking, and most involve risks to health. But the fine points *can* get complicated.

Because the fact is that alcohol produces few serious risks to health when used in moderation—and it may even be beneficial: Statistics show that moderate drinkers live longer than both heavy drinkers *and* abstainers.

Still, when used to excess, booze can (and does) produce massive, irreversible damage to the brain, central nervous system, liver, and other body systems.

Still, and if after reading the last two statements all that sticks in your head is the idea that drinking *might* be good for you ("Sez here booze is *good* for you! *Dude!!!*"), remember that seems true for *moderate* drinkers only.

Making things *really* tricky is the fact that most problem drinkers used to *be* moderate drinkers, and the line that separates them can be as fuzzy as the white line (or flashing red-and-blue lights) in a drunk's rear-view mirror.

■ **Drinking & Pregnancy.** Other drinking-related health problems are more clear-cut, especially the risk to a fetus during pregnancy.

And it's not just *heavy* drinking during pregnancy that increases the risk of birth defects; as little as two drinks a day can reduce birth weight, while two ounces of alcohol *a week* can raise the risk of spontaneous abortion.

In fact, researchers today think that risks may even increase with a woman's drinking *before* pregnancy.

That means that if you drink heavily before pregnancy, your baby could still have problems, even if you stop drinking *during* pregnancy.

So if you're a drinker and you're thinking about going into the mom business some time soon, think about *your* drinking. Then think about giving it up. And if you need to, *give it up.*

It could be the best present anyone will ever give your baby.

booze, bodies & babies

Top 10 LIST

The 10 Top Euphemisms For The Word

"Drunk"

10. schnockered
9. blotto
8. polluted
7. cockeyed
6. fried
5. lit
4. faced
3. oiled
2. wasted
1. stupid



Truth & consequences. It may have a reputation as a romance enhancer, but booze can also cause more than its share of performance problems.