

## 'Alcohol, Drugs and Using the Road'

## Alcohol Fact Sheet

## Introduction

Alcohol is part of our culture and often plays a part in our social lives. Many people drink alcohol on all sorts of occasions for all sorts of reasons. But it is actually a very powerful depressant drug, which acts on all our physical and mental functions. Also, far too many people are killed on our roads as a result of alcohol consumption.

Understanding how alcohol works, the effects it has, and the possible consequences of those effects will help students make informed choices about 'sensible drinking'.

## Some Alcohol Facts

## Alcohol:

- Is a very powerful depressant drug
- Works on the central nervous
- Affects hand-eye co-ordination and attention span
- Affects decision-making ability
- Slows reaction times
- Makes processing information more difficult
- Instructions from brain to muscles are delayed
- Leads to dehydration
- Impairs hearing
- Decreases peripheral vision and tolerance to dazzle
- Induces nausea and vomiting
- Brings on tiredness, sadness, aggression
- Can cause loss of colour vision, perception of form and dimensions
- Eyes take longer to focus near/far and to changes in brightness
- Reduces ability to perform two or more tasks at the same time
- Impedes sense of judgement, especially speed and distance
- Affects bodily balance and spatial awareness, causing dizziness and disorientation
- Can induce stupor, coma, hypothermia, and can even lead to death
- Lowers inhibitions, person becomes more talkative, increased sense of well-being
- Increases confidence and self-belief, prepared to take greater risks



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**Alcohol:**

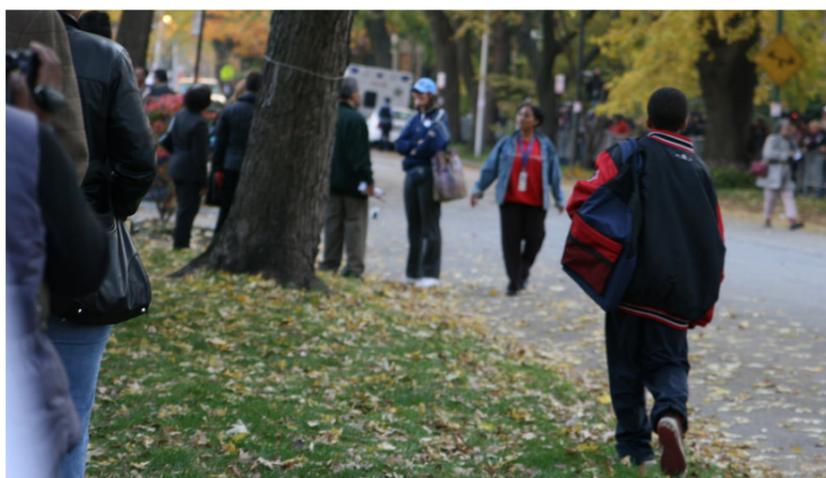
- Is able to pass directly through the soft mucous lining of the mouth, the stomach wall and the intestinal walls, into the bloodstream, because it is a very small soluble molecule and so doesn't require prior digestion
- Is distributed via the bloodstream to all parts of the body and works on the central nervous system slowing all bodily functions, both physical and mental
- Is absorbed into the bloodstream at various rates dependant on gender, weight, proportion of body fat, whether there is food in the stomach – so varies from person to person
- Can become addictive (alcoholism)
- Is processed by the liver – the elimination process is slow and at a fixed rate depending on the efficiency of the liver – an efficient liver can process alcohol at 1 Unit per Hour. A less healthy liver will take longer
- Can cause liver damage and 'delirium tremens' (the 'DTs' or 'shakes')
- Overdose can lead to death, especially if mixed with other drugs

**How long alcohol stays in the system**

- Can be measured by % ABV ('alcohol by volume' – found on the label)
- Can be measured in Units - A Unit of alcohol is 10ml of pure alcohol – the number of alcohol Units in a drink is usually, but not always, found on the bottle or can
- You can calculate the number of Units in a drink using this formula:

$$\frac{\text{Volume (ml)} \times \% \text{ ABV}}{1000}$$

- Has legal limits for driving – in the UK these are 35 micrograms of alcohol in 100 millilitres of breath and/or 80 milligrams of alcohol in 100 millilitres of blood

**Alcohol:**

- When mixed with driving, can lead to a driving ban, a hefty fine, an offence that stays on your licence for 11 years and a criminal record
- Can really impact on people's lives – relationships, job prospects, travel abroad, insurance premiums, hiring a car and social standing
- Can lead to road traffic collisions, which in turn can cause severe or permanent injuries, or even death. If you contribute to these, you could be facing a long (up to 14 years!) jail sentence