

'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



'Alcohol, Drugs and Using the Road'

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