

### Alcohol and Your Body

Alcohol is absorbed into the bloodstream from the stomach and the upper intestine. It then circulates around the body to the brain.

Alcohol affects your brain. The first drink or two makes us feel good. This is because a little bit of alcohol speeds up your heart rate and other body systems. It also triggers the release of certain brain chemicals that make us feel good.

But alcohol is actually a depressant. This does not refer to emotional depression, although that can be a result of heavy drinking. What it means is that more alcohol slows down your body systems and affects the ability of your mind and body to function properly. It especially interferes with those parts of the brain that control thinking, memory, muscle movements, balance, and reaction time.

An example of reaction time: you're driving your snowmobile when suddenly someone drives fast out of a driveway, right in front of you. Without even thinking, you throw on the brakes and turn off to the side fast. When you have been drinking, you cannot think, react or co-ordinate your movements as quickly. This is why people have more accidents and injuries when they've been drinking.

The more alcohol you have circulating in your blood, the more trouble you will have thinking and doing things. Eventually your body shuts down and you pass out.

Drinking a lot of alcohol in a very short time causes alcohol poisoning and can kill a person. If a person passes out, there is also the danger of vomiting and choking to death while unconscious.

The liver produces a chemical that breaks down alcohol and gets it out of your body. But it takes the liver about an hour and a half to process one drink.

So the more you drink, the more alcohol builds up in your blood. Many things influence how quickly alcohol affects a person: whether you've eaten and the kind of food you've eaten, your age, the amount of body fat, your physical health, etc.

Men and women process alcohol differently.

- A large part of the body is water. The more you weigh, the more fluid (blood, water, etc.) you have in your body. The more fluid you have, the more the alcohol is diluted, so it doesn't have as big an effect as quickly.
- Women are smaller, so they have less fluid, so the alcohol circulating through them is more concentrated and affects them more quickly.
- Women also have less of the liver chemical that gets rid of alcohol.
- Generally, a 55-kilogram (120-pound) woman will definitely be affected negatively (thinking, co-ordination) if she has two drinks in an hour. An 82-kilogram (180-pound) man will show these effects if he has about 3.5 drinks in an hour. These effects quickly get worse if the person drinks more without giving the liver time to get rid of the alcohol that's already in the body.
- If the liver has to process too much alcohol too often, it starts to get damaged. First, the liver starts to lose its ability to process the fat in food, so fat builds up in the liver.

# AJUNNGINIQ CENTRE

- More drinking causes actual damage and liver chemicals start leaking out into your bloodstream. These liver chemicals can be found with blood tests. If your doctor says your blood test shows liver chemicals, it means you have some liver damage. Follow the doctor's advice, make sure you get proper nutrition, which can help prevent further damage, and stop drinking.
- If you continue to drink heavily, the liver will start to form areas of hard scars. This is called cirrhosis. Eventually, the liver will be so damaged that it will be a hard lump that cannot do its job of processing nutrients and ridding your body of poisons. This leads to death.

## **An episode of heavy drinking can cause:**

- hangover (headache, throwing up, shakiness)—this is the result of your body producing chemicals and using up water to try to get rid of an alcohol overdose
- diarrhea in the morning
- disturbed sleep—you wake up in the middle of the night and can't get back to sleep, or you sleep very restlessly and wake up tired

## **Heavy drinking can lead to:**

- damage to the pancreas, which is an important part of processing food and other parts of the digestive system
- cancers (for example—mouth, throat, liver)
- high blood pressure
- heart problems
- strokes
- brain and nerve damage
- less sex hormone production
- physical and psychological dependence/addiction
- an increased risk of breast cancer in women

Heavy drinking can also cause changes in brain chemistry and nutritional deficiencies, which can lead to ongoing anxiety and depression. Even individual episodes of heavy drinking can end up in depression. First you feel high and good and then you crash. The depression and anxiety can be made even worse because you may feel bad about yourself for drinking too much.