

ALCOHOL: KNOW THE FACTS

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August is the most dangerous month for drinking and driving, according to a report just released by the Automobile Club of Southern California, which analyzed state-wide data for the past five years. More Californians are injured or killed in alcohol-related collisions during August than in any other month. The obvious explanation: summer vacations and outdoor recreational activities, which often include drinking.

Indeed, this is the time of year when most of us look forward to some time to kick back and relax for awhile, whether at the beach, the lake, or some other vacation destination. And relaxing is associated with drinking for many adults (and too many teens and kids!) Trips to emergency rooms, court, and the cemetery rarely come to mind as we kick back and share good times with friends and family over a few beers or a pitcher of margaritas. Yet that may be the outcome if you drink and drive, or get into a car, boat or other vehicle with an intoxicated person, or are unlucky enough to be in the path of a drunk driver.

How to avoid such a scenario in your life? First, know the facts about alcohol and alcohol abuse:

1. For most adults, moderate alcohol use--up to two drinks per day for men and one drink per day for women and older people--causes few if any problems. *There is no "safe" level of drinking for pregnant women, people under 21, recovering alcoholics, or those taking certain medications.*
2. "One drink" is defined as: a 12 oz. beer, a 5-oz. glass of wine, or a 1.5 oz. shot of hard liquor. *When you're pouring drinks, do you measure?*
3. Women become more impaired than men do after drinking the same amount of alcohol, even when differences in body weight are taken into account. This is because the cellular composition of women's bodies is different (more fat, less water) than in men.
4. *The ability to "drink everyone else under the table" is an early sign of alcoholism.*
5. It takes about an hour for the body to metabolize one drink, in other words for the alcohol to get out of your bloodstream and into your bladder. However, impairment is greatest in the second half of the hour – and if you're drinking at a faster rate than one drink an hour, you will get more impaired, and stay impaired longer.
6. *Drinking coffee won't sober you up any faster – you'll just be an alert drunk!*
7. You do get drunk faster on an empty stomach – also if you haven't slept well the night before; if you're taking certain medications; if you're premenstrual; or if you're over 65.
8. While it's believed that small amounts of alcohol (one drink with dinner) may help protect against heart disease by reducing the risk of blood clots in the arteries, you can achieve the same health benefit from a low-fat diet with plenty of fruits and vegetables.
9. Heavy drinking increases the risk of heart failure, stroke, and high blood pressure.
10. The cost of a first-time DUI is estimated at over \$12,000: this includes fines, DMV fees, legal fees, the increase in car insurance, and alcohol education classes.

So have a safe and healthy summer – don't drink and drive, or get into a vehicle with someone who has been drinking or seems drunk. And if you are the host, don't allow any guest who has been drinking to drive home. For more information about alcohol and alcohol abuse, go to www.niaaa.nih.gov - or call me!