

# Mixing drugs and alcohol

Deadly  
Cocktails



## Alcohol

### The effect on your health

Drinking in excess can have harmful effects on your health.

#### Short-term effects of Alcohol:

- Changes the way you think and behave
- Interference with sleep patterns
- Heart and circulatory problems

#### And may lead to:

- Risky behaviour
- Injury
- Death

#### Long-term effects of Alcohol:

- Cancer and stroke
- Cirrhosis of the liver
- Brain damage and memory loss
- Alcohol dependence
- High Blood Pressure
- Stomach and liver disorders
- Weight gain
- Financial hardship

#### Dependence can lead to:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Feelings of loss of control

### Guidelines to lessen the risks to your health

Due to the different ways that alcohol can affect people, there is no amount of alcohol that can be said to be safe for everyone. People choosing to drink must realise that there will always be some risk to their health and social well-being. However, there are ways to minimise the risks.

But generally to lessen the risks to your health, the following recommendations have been made;

- **For men:**
  - No more than 4 standard drinks a day on average
  - No more than 6 standard drinks on any one day
  - One or two alcohol-free days per week
- **For women:**
  - No more than 2 standard drinks a day on average
  - No more than 4 standard drinks on any one day
  - One or two alcohol-free days per week

**Drinking under the recommended low-risk levels is unlikely to harm your health**

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## What is a standard drink?

In Australia any drink that contains **10 grams** of alcohol

- 285 ml middy of low strength beer (<3% alc/vol)=**0.5**
- 285 ml middy of mid strength beer (3-4% alc/vol)=**0.8**
- 285 ml middy of full strength beer (4-6% alc/vol)=**1**
- 1 glass 100 ml of wine (13%alc/vol)=**1**
- 1 glass of port or sherry (18% alc/vol)=**1**
- 1 shot of 30 ml spirits (40% alc/vol)=**1**
- 375 ml can of full strength beer (4-6% alc/vol)=**1.5**
- 750 ml bottle of wine (10-14% alc/vol)=**7.5**
- 700 ml bottle of spirit (37-43% alc/vol)=**23**

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## What happens when you drink?

- When a person drinks alcohol is rapidly absorbed into the blood stream, through the stomach wall and the small intestine.
- Once in the bloodstream the alcohol goes to all parts of the body including the brain.
- If there is food in the stomach it can slow the speed of absorption.

## How does the body get rid of alcohol?

- Most alcohol is changed by a healthy liver into water, carbon dioxide and other substances.
- Small amounts (10%) leave the body unchanged in urine, sweat and breath.
- **REMEMBER** there is no fast way to sober up.
- Black coffee, cold showers and exercise will **NOT** affect the speed at which the liver breaks down the alcohol.

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## Pregnancy and alcohol

When you are pregnant, alcohol in your blood stream passes through the placenta into the blood of the foetus. High quantities can cause problems for the unborn child. The most vulnerable times for the unborn child are in the first few weeks after conception. Drinking high quantities during pregnancy can affect the growth and development of the unborn child. Babies born with foetal alcohol syndrome may suffer physical abnormalities, lower weight, height and intellectual impairment. **It is best not to drink at all during pregnancy!**

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## Alcohol and Driving

Even small amounts of alcohol can affect your driving ability. The more you drink the greater your chances are of being involved in an accident. Once alcohol is in the blood stream it is processed at the rate of one standard drink per hour. A woman can only drink one standard drink per hour and a man can have two standard drinks in the first hour and one standard drink each hour after that to remain below 0.05%. One standard drink will raise the BAC of an average-sized health woman by approximately 0.03% and 0.02% in men. Remember-This is only a rough guide. There can be a lot of variation however such as age, body type, weight, medical conditions etc.

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Undertake activities that will involve risk or a degree of skill under the influence of alcohol **such as:**

- Using complex or heavy machinery
- Driving
- Operating vehicles/vessels
- Operating mobile plants
- Even small amounts of alcohol can affect your judgement and performance

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## Drugs

A drug is a broad label given to any substance that changes the way your brain works. Drugs can be broadly classified into three groups:

1. Depressants
2. Stimulants
3. Hallucinogens

### **Depressants**

Some drugs have a "depressant" affect and slow down your reaction to things. Taken in small amounts they may make you feel more relaxed. Taken in large amounts they may cause you to pass out as they slow down your breathing and heart rate or may cause nausea, vomiting and even death. The effect may also be influenced by the amount you take. Taken in large amounts may cause hallucinations.

#### **Depressant drugs include:**

- Alcohol
- Opiates and opioids, including drugs like heroin, opium, morphine, codeine and methadone
- Cannabis (marijuana, hashish, hash oil)
- Sedatives and hypnotics (including valium and rohypnol)
- Barbiturates
- Some solvents and inhalants, like petrol, glue, and paint thinners

### **Stimulants**

Stimulants make you feel more awake and alert. They increase your heart rate, body temperature and blood pressure. You may make you feel agitated, keep you awake, decrease your appetite and dilate your pupils. If you take a large amount of a stimulant drug you can become anxious, paranoid, aggressive and get stomach cramps.

#### **Stimulant drugs include:**

- Tobacco
- Caffeine
- Amphetamines (eg speed or methamphetamine)
- Ephedrine (Sudafed)
- Cocaine
- Ecstasy (MDMA)

### **Hallucinogens**

Hallucinogens may change people's perceptions of reality. People may experience visual or auditory hallucinations and it is not uncommon to experience anxiety, panic or paranoia during a hallucination. It is difficult to predict the length and frequency of the hallucinations. Losing contact with reality and perception changes may cause people to have accidents and take risks they wouldn't normally take. Some people may develop a drug-induced psychosis as a result of taking hallucinogenic drugs.

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## Hallucinogenic drugs include:

- LSD (acid, trips)
- Magic Mushrooms
- Mescaline
- Cannabis may have hallucinogenic effects

## Mixing drugs and alcohol

Mixing drugs can be dangerous. Stimulants can hide the effects of depressant drugs like alcohol. You may feel less drunk than you are which may mean you take more risks, and put yourself in danger. Mixing alcohol with other drugs is seriously dangerous. This is because drink serves to slow down the nervous system (controlling heart and breathing rate). Alcohol combined with other depressant drugs, it could see the body shut down altogether. Barbiturates should never be mixed with alcohol, as this is often a deadly combination.

Australian, Department of Health & Ageing, *Australian Alcohol Guidelines*  
<http://www.alcohol.gov.au/internet/alcohol/publishing.nsf/Content/guidelines>