



# Binge Drinking

Binge drinking is defined as someone who drinks to get drunk on any single occasion. Binge drinking is usually perceived as a young person's problem because of media reporting. In reality it is endemic in the Australian culture, however the 20-29 year age group<sup>1</sup> have the greatest number of people that drink at levels for accident and injury. Whether you binge drink occasionally or binge drink every week, you are at risk of harm of injury, accidents, disease and death.

## **Risk of injury and health problems**

Injuries are the leading cause of death for people under 30 years of age. Injuries are the leading cause of death for people under 44 years of age and about two-thirds of all injuries involve people under 30 years of age<sup>2</sup>. Alcohol-related injuries account for between 10% and 20% of all injuries in people over 16–18 years of age<sup>3</sup> and the risk is particularly high for those who occasionally drink much more than their usual amount. Young adults are more likely to take greater risks than older ones but have less developed decision making skills. When drunkenness is added to this mix, the likelihood of injuries caused by violence, self harm, suicide and homicide is greatly increased. Females under 30 years of age are the group most likely to be the victims of alcohol related violence.

Risk of injury due to falls, road accidents, coercive sexual activity and unsafe sex are other examples where a lack of judgment from alcohol use can impact on personal safety. The physical health risks associated with binge drinking can include dehydration, hangovers headaches and vomiting, weight gain and memory loss.

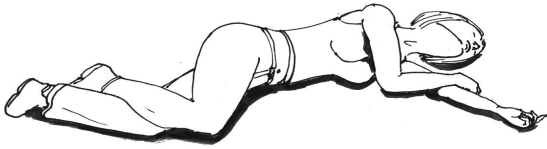
## **Alcohol poisoning**

Alcohol is toxic and in large doses can poison the body. At very high blood alcohol levels a person may fit, lose consciousness, fall into a coma and/or die from severe respiratory depression. If you are helping a person who has any of the following signs you should seek emergency medical help immediately:

- They are unconscious and can't be awakened by gentle shaking or shouting
- Their skin is cold, clammy, pale and bluish in colour, which means the person is not getting enough oxygen
- They are breathing very slowly; if there are more than 10 seconds in between each breath – it's an emergency
- The person is vomiting without waking up

To call for help dial 000, or 112 on your mobile- this will connect you to emergency services even if you are out of range or have no credit!

## Re Balance Your Lifestyle



Safety Tip: if a mate has 'passed out' put them on their side in the recovery position and stay with them. Death from alcohol poisoning has occurred when the drinker has been sick and choked on their own vomit.

It is also important to be aware that alcohol affects the body's thermostat. People have died of exposure in comparatively warm climates because they have been left to 'sleep it off' and their body temperature has dropped.

### **Binge drinking and other drugs**

Alcohol is a depressant drug and mixing it with other depressant drugs such as sleeping pills, GHB or heroin can be fatal because of the possibility of respiratory failure. On the other hand, using a stimulant drug such as ecstasy, speed or cocaine, whilst drinking, is likely to mask the effects of alcohol. This can lead to people thinking they are 'fine' to drive when in reality they are in fact over the legal limit to drive. Another danger is that the body is placed under a huge stress trying to maintain a functional balance while the effect of one type of drug is battling it out with the other. The hangover and come down from a chemical combination such as this is usually quite severe and includes massive dehydration, anxiety, edginess and irritability.

### **Energy drinks**

There have been reports of young people dying, possibly as a result of consuming energy drinks and France has banned their sale<sup>3</sup>. In Britain a certain energy drink has been dubbed the 'clubbers' drink', and is often mixed with vodka. The extremely high amounts of caffeine consumed enable the person to drink far more alcohol than under normal circumstances and in a Brazilian study<sup>4</sup> people have reported that the mix makes them drunker than they feel. Adverse effects associated with caffeine consumption in amounts greater than 400 mg include nervousness, irritability, sleeplessness, dehydration, abnormal heart rhythms, decreased bone density and stomach upset.

## Re Balance Your Lifestyle

### Australian Low Risk Drinking Guidelines



For healthy men and women, drinking no more than four standard drinks on a single occasion reduces the risk of alcohol-related injury arising from that occasion.

- NDARC Fact sheet: The Harmful Effects of Alcohol      Headspace Fact sheet 3 Alcohol & Binge Drinking  
 NCETA (2004) Alcohol and Other Drugs: A Handbook for Health Professionals  
 1, 2 NHMRC Australian alcohol guidelines for low-risk drinking  
 3 <http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/5753.php>  
 4 <http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/40481.php>