

The Harmful Effects of Alcohol

Brain & Central Nervous System

Impaired behavior, judgment, memory, concentration & coordination

—Drinker experiences mild euphoria and loss of inhibition as alcohol impairs regions of the brain controlling behavior and emotion; alcohol induces extreme mood swings and emotional outbursts.

Brain Damage & Affect

—Alcohol acts as a sedative on the Central Nervous System, depressing the nerve cells in the brain, dulling, altering, and damaging their ability to respond. Large doses cause sleep, anesthesia, respiratory failure, coma and death.

Brain Disorders & Addiction

—Long term drinking may result in permanent brain damage, serious mental disorders, and addiction to alcohol.

Lungs

—High amounts of alcohol may cause breathing to stop, leading to death.
—Lowered resistance to infection.

Liver

—Chronic heavy drinking may cause alcoholic hepatitis (inflammation and destruction of liver cells) and then cirrhosis (irreversible lesions, scarring, and destruction of liver cells). Impairs the liver's ability to remove yellow pigment and skin appears yellow (jaundice).

—Liver damage causes fluid to build in extremities (edema).

—Decreases production of blood-clotting factors; may cause uncontrolled bleeding.

—Liver accumulates fat which can cause liver failure, coma, and death.

Reproductive System

Males & Females

—Sexual functioning can be impaired and deteriorate, resulting in impotence and infertility, sometimes irreversible. Females also have high risk of developing breast cancer.

Pregnancy

—Drinking during pregnancy significantly increases the chance of delivering a baby with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome; small head, possible brain damage, abnormal facial features, poor muscle tone, speech and sleep disorders, and retarded growth and development.

Other Effects on Central Nervous System

- Impaired visual ability
- Unclear hearing
- Dulled smell & taste
- Loss of pain perception
- Altered sense of time and space
- Impaired fine motor skills
- Slowed reactions
- Impaired sexual performance

Eyes

- Distorted vision and ability to adjust to light; pinpoint pupils and red eyes

Ears

- Diminishes ability to distinguish between sounds and perceive their direction

Mouth

- Slurred speech; dulls taste and smell, reducing desire to eat

Throat

- Irritation and damage of lining of esophagus, induces severe vomiting, hemorrhaging, pain, and difficulty swallowing; Cancer

Heart

- Weakens the heart muscle and ability to pump (cardiomyopathy).
- Heart enlargement, abnormal heart signs, and irregular heart beat.
- Increases blood pressure, risk of heart attack, and strokes
- Inhibits production of white and red blood cells

Muscles

- Muscles become weaker and atrophy, pain, spasms, and tenderness occur

Stomach

- Irritation of stomach lining, peptic ulcers, inflammation, bleeding lesions, and cancer

Pancreas

- Significant risk of pancreatic, a chronic inflammation of pancreas

Intestines

- Irritation of the lining of the intestinal tract and colon; chronic drinking may result in inflammation, ulcers, and cancer of the intestines and colon.
- Nausea, diarrhea, vomiting, sweating, and loss of appetite are common.
- Alcohol impairs small intestine's ability to process nutrients and vitamins.

Bones

- Alcohol interferes with body's ability to absorb calcium, resulting in bones being weak, soft, brittle, and thinner (osteoporosis).

