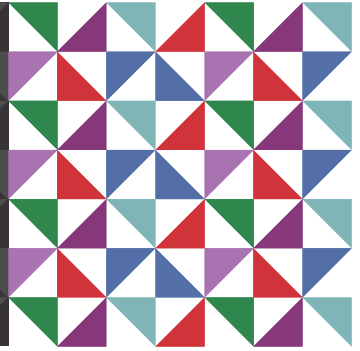




DUT
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student
COUNSELLING
and health



ALCOHOL-

Know your
limits
and drink
responsibly



ALCOHOL -Know your limits and drink responsibly

As a young adult, you might be naturally curious about alcohol, or you might feel peer pressure to drink. Drinking alcohol is a common practice for many South Africans and for most people occasional, moderate alcohol use does not get in the way of functioning. However, sometimes excessive use does interfere and can lead to negative consequences. Understanding the risks of alcohol, learning how to recognise excessive use and, the signs of alcohol dependence is an important step in drinking responsibly.

HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?

Students often underestimate the quantities of alcohol that they consume. The alcohol content of a drink is normally measured in 'units'. Healthy guidelines suggest that men should not exceed three or four units of alcohol a day, and women not more than two to three units. Due to differences in body composition and water content, these limits are lower for women and they therefore experience decreased tolerance to alcohol. Even men and women of the same size will not have similar tolerance levels. Women will therefore feel the effects of the alcohol more quickly.

KNOW YOUR UNITS

You definitely can't just count each drink as a unit of alcohol. The number of units depends on the strength and size of each drink, so it can vary a lot.

What is a unit?

(Adapted from South Africans Against Drunk Driving; SADD)

One tot 25ml of Tequila = 1 unit

One tot (25ml) of any spirits (vodka/brandy/whiskey/gin etc at 43 %) = 1 unit

One (75ml) glass of wine (at 14%) = 1 unit

One cider = 2 units

One beer = 1.5- 1.7 units

One Quart Beer (750 ml) = 3.5-4 units

One Sorghum beer = 1.5 units

One Spirit Cooler = 1.2 -1.9 units

One Cocktail = 2-4 units

LEGAL LIMITS: DRINKING AND DRIVING

Alcohol is primarily absorbed into the bloodstream through the intestines. The bloodstream carries alcohol to the brain resulting in progressive impairment. This impairment, amongst other things, affects our ability to drive! Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) is a measure of the amount of alcohol in the bloodstream. It is measured by the number of grams of alcohol in 100ml of blood. In South Africa, the legal limit for BAC for fully licensed car drivers is below 0.05 (gram/100ml). For example, a BAC of .05 means .05 grams of alcohol in every 100ml of blood. 1 unit of alcohol equals 0.02 grams of alcohol in every 100ml of blood, therefore more than 2 units of alcohol will push you over the legal limit. However, driving is impaired after even 1 unit, so it is SAFEST NOT TO DRINK THEN DRIVE.



WHEN DOES DRINKING BECOME PROBLEM DRINKING

Moderate or "social drinking" becomes a problem when drinkers regularly exceed the healthy guidelines of alcohol use, with consequences for the drinker's physical and emotional health and, social relationships. It is often a line students cross unknowingly.

What is Binge Drinking?

Binge drinking is a growing and very dangerous problem. FIVE UNITS OF ALCOHOL OR MORE CONSUMED IN LESS THAN TWO HOURS IS CONSIDERED BINGE AND HEAVY DRINKING. People who binge drink cause rapid damage to their brains. The bad news for students is that evidence suggests that the developing brain is especially vulnerable to the effects of alcohol.

Another danger associated with binge drinking is alcohol poisoning. This can be potentially fatal, leading to coma or even death.

What is Alcohol Poisoning?

Alcohol is a central nervous system depressant. Too much alcohol in too short a period of time can result in alcohol poisoning that slows the body processes to such an extent that it can lead to death.

- The first system of the body to be affected is reasoning
- Speech becomes slurred and co-ordination is affected
- A person may become comatose and unresponsive (often are pale and pasty)
- The final system that shuts down is the respiratory system- so the person stops breathing, and will die if not artificially resuscitated (brain death occurs after a few minutes of the brain being starved of oxygen)

What to do in case of alcohol poisoning

Extreme confusion and loss of consciousness after excessive alcohol consumption are indicators of alcohol poisoning and require IMMEDIATE medical attention. If you observe someone that is passed out, will NOT gain consciousness and has not vomited after consuming large amounts of alcohol;

* CALL FOR HELP AND GET THE PERSON TO THE HOSPITAL

- Ambulances -10111
- Netcare- 082 911
- ER24 -084 124
- EMRS -10117
- Citymed- -0800 333911



* WHILE WAITING FOR THE AMBULANCE

- LIE THE PERSON ON THEIR SIDE IN THE RECOVERY POSITION (SO THAT THEY CAN VOMIT, AND NOT CHOKE ON THEIR VOMIT)
- CHECK THEIR PULSE
- IF BREATHING HAS STOPPED, AND IF YOU ARE TRAINED, DO ARTIFICIAL RESUSCITATION
- DO NOT TRY AND MAKE THEM VOMIT
- DO NOT POUR WATER ON THEM OR PUT THEM IN A SHOWER/POOL

NOTE THE ONLY THING THAT TAKES ALCOHOL OUT OF THE BODY IS TIME!

What is Alcohol Dependence?

Alcohol makes an appearance in so many parts of our lives that it can be easy to forget that, like many drugs, it's addictive, both physically and psychologically.

Dependency to alcohol is progressive. That means that it gets worse over time and gradually the effects become more serious. People who are alcohol dependent experience;

- a craving for alcohol
- a loss of control of their drinking
- withdrawal symptoms, such as sweating, shaking and nausea, when they are not drinking
- an increased tolerance to alcohol so that they have to drink more to achieve the same effect.

Despite being aware of the negative consequences of their drinking, people with alcohol dependency continue to drink.

EFFECTS OF DRINKING

Physiological Effects of Drinking Alcohol

Alcohol suppresses the part of the brain that controls judgement. This results in a loss of inhibition - your ability to say "NO"! It also affects physical coordination, resulting in blurred vision, slurred speech, and poor balance. These effects are why alcohol is associated with CRIME, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE and CAR ACCIDENTS.

Short to medium term effect

Drinking might make you feel attractive, but it has just the OPPOSITE effect.

Some physical changes heavy drinkers can expect include;

1. Dry Skin: Alcohol dehydrates your body and skin, because it blocks the release of anti-diuretic hormones, so the kidneys get rid of too much water.
2. Broken Veins: Alcohol dilates blood vessels near the surface of the skin, causing ugly red capillaries or veins, especially around the nose and cheeks.
3. Bloodshot eyes: Alcohol can inflame and enlarge the small blood vessels on the surface of the eyes
4. Weight gain: Alcohol is high in calories.
5. Bad Smell: The liver metabolises most alcohol, but 5-10 % is excreted straight through the urine, breath and sweat.

6. Sexual Effect: Alcohol reduces sexual arousal. Men will have difficulty getting erections and both men and women may have difficulty experiencing orgasm. Increased risky sexual behaviour, which can result in sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/Aids and unplanned pregnancies.
7. Bruises and scarring: Drinkers are more likely to have accidents or fights, leading to cuts, bruises and broken bones.

Long Term Effects

1. Liver Disease: Cirrhosis of the liver or liver cancer.
2. Stomach Disorders, such as ulcers
3. Sexual Effects: Loss of libido in men and women as well as difficulty experiencing orgasm. In men erectile disorders i.e. impotence and erectile dysfunction may occur
4. High Blood Pressure: this leads to an increased risk of strokes or heart attacks.
5. Cancer
6. Heart failure
7. Brain Damage, including memory loss, seizures or dementia.

Psychological Effects of Drinking Alcohol

Alcohol has associated psychological effects. If you've had a lot to drink you may experience strong emotional responses- you may become aggressive or tearful.

Regular, heavy drinking interferes with neurotransmitters in our brains that are needed for good mental health. The long term use of alcohol can result in:

1. Anxiety and depression
2. Mood swings and violence
3. Suicide; if you are depressed and you drink too much you put yourself at a much greater risk to self-harm and suicide.
4. Negative interpersonal, academic and occupational consequences. These consequences can also contribute to depression and anxiety.

Heavy drinking can aggravate symptoms of depression and anxiety. Drinking may bring short term relief from anxiety and stress, but in the long term it makes you feel worse, especially if you are drinking regularly and in excess.

Drink sensibly and avoid drinking to lift your mood. Avoid drinking as a way to problem solve. It is far more beneficial to seek supportive counseling when experiencing emotional difficulties.

HOW TO LIMIT YOUR ALCOHOL INTAKE

Did you know that the brain is considered to still be developing until the age of 21? Research regarding the effects of alcohol on the developing brain suggests that abstinence from alcohol is wisest until you are over 21. **YOU DON'T HAVE TO DRINK TO HAVE A GOOD TIME.** Work on changing your attitude, learn to be assertive and say No! If you do drink, drink a little and slowly.



1. Most people would benefit from cutting down. If you are unsure, keep a diary of intake in units to clarify your pattern of use and quantities. Identify those occasions, times of day, companions, or moods when you are prone to excessive use.
2. Cutting down works best if you set limits for yourself that you feel you might reasonably stick to. It can be helpful to write up a balance sheet of the positives and negatives of drinking, in order to clarify whether you are really determined to cut down.
3. **IT WILL TAKE ABOUT AN HOUR FOR YOUR BODY TO BREAK DOWN AND METABOLISE ONE UNIT OF ALCOHOL. FOOD, COFFEE, WATER does not sober you up! FOLLOW THIS RULE**
1 unit per hour maximum, DRINK LESS AND SLOWER!
4. Replace your usual drink with one containing less alcohol. Try a light beer (in alcohol not in calories!) or alternate alcoholic drinks with non-alcoholic drinks.
5. Plan ahead.
 - Think how you would like to feel and behave that night and the next day. Decide how many drinks you can safely handle. Ask someone you trust to support you in this.
 - Plan how you are going to get home if you are going to be drinking: ask a designated driver before going out to assist, get a taxi or use a drive me home service.
6. If you go out take a limited amount of money. And leave debit or credit cards behind!

7. Choose activities where alcohol isn't the focus of the evening. Rather than just focusing on reducing your alcohol intake, think about increasing some other activity. There are lots of different and novel opportunities to do something different whilst you are at university - use them; you may uncover an unknown aspect to your personality.
8. The influence of others can be powerful, so use it to support yourself. Friends may well have been concerned about you for some time, speak to them about your efforts to cut down and accept their support.
9. Try alternative ways to deal with stress. Instead of reaching for a beer or glass of wine after a hard day, go for a run, swim or to a yoga class, or a talk to a friend about what's worrying you.
10. Don't drink every night- have at least two or three evenings without alcohol but don't be tempted to binge on the nights you do drink.

REMEMBER RESPECT FOR OTHERS

Less than half the world's population (38.3%) actually drinks alcohol (WHO, 2012). Students who drink can often offend others who do not, by simply making the assumption that everyone drinks. There are many reasons for not drinking, including a person's preference, faith or culture, being on certain medications or factors like intolerance to smoky environments. So when you are arranging social events or meetings, go out of your way to include others and respect their choices.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER

Answering yes to some of the following questions could indicate that your drinking habits are problematic and may be harmful to your physical and emotional health.

- ⊙ Have you ever felt you need to cut down on your drinking?
- ⊙ Do you feel guilty about your drinking?
- ⊙ Do you ever have six or more drinks on a single occasion?
- ⊙ Do you regularly fail to do what is expected from you because of drinking?
- ⊙ Are there academic, financial, legal or family problems related to your drinking?
- ⊙ Do you drink in an effort to feel "normal" or because it is the only way you can have fun when out?

- ⊙ Have you ever had a drink first thing in the morning in order to steady yourself or get rid of a hangover?
- ⊙ Do you drink when you feel angry or sad?
- ⊙ Have friends or family been concerned and suggested you cut down your drinking?
- ⊙ Do you drink after telling yourself you won't?
- ⊙ Are you experiencing increased aggressiveness or are you behaving in a reckless manner?
- ⊙ Have you lost interest in activities that used to bring you pleasure?
- ⊙ Do you centre most recreational activities around drinking?
- ⊙ Do you frequently experience memory loss after a night out drinking?

(Self-assessment adapted from CAGE self-assessment, Audit self-assessment and Drink Aware).

SEEKING HELP

If you feel that your drinking is cause for concern and your efforts to manage this have been unsuccessful, speak to a psychologist at the Student Counselling Centre, or to your doctor. If in doubt come and see a psychologist.

RESOURCES:

- DUT Student Counselling Centre – (031) 373 2266
- DUT Isolempilo Health Clinic – (031) 373 2223
- SANCA- (031) 3032202
- Alcoholics Anonymous- (031) 301-4959
- Lulama Treatment Centre – (031) 202 2241
- South Africans Against Drunk Driving- www.sadd.org.za

This is an initiative of:

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