



Cope

Binge drinking and its risks

You're stuck at home. You're stressed. And you just want to escape from all the stress and anxiety that COVID-19 has brought. So you may be tempted to drink more than usual. But how do you know if your drinking is a problem?

If you're like a lot of people, you think of college students when you think of binge drinking. But the reality is very different. In fact, binge drinking is the most common, costly and deadly pattern of excessive alcohol use in the United States.¹

Consider these facts:²

- An average of six people die every day of alcohol poisoning
- 76 percent of them are between the ages of 35 and 64
- Three out of four people who die from alcohol poisoning are men

Alcohol poisoning is closely tied to binge drinking. But how much do you know about this issue? We've compiled facts to help you better understand binge drinking and its risks.

What is binge drinking?

Sometimes people drink a little too much. But what exactly is a binge? The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention define binge drinking as a pattern of drinking that brings a person's blood alcohol concentration (BAC) to 0.08 grams or more.²

So how much is that? It's about five drinks for a man or four drinks for a woman within about two hours.² A drink can be 12 ounces of beer, eight ounces of malt liquor, five ounces of wine or one and a half ounces of distilled spirits.² On the other hand, low risk drinking is about one drink a day for women or two drinks each day for men.³

When you drink alcohol, it enters your bloodstream through your stomach and travels to your brain. Your liver processes the alcohol, but can only do so at a rate of one drink per hour.⁴

¹[Binge drinking](#). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Accessed May 2020.

²[Alcohol poisoning deaths](#). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Accessed May 2020.

³[Dietary guidelines for alcohol](#). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Accessed May 2020.

⁴UC Santa Cruz. [Alcohol and your body](#). Student health outreach and promotion. Accessed May 2020.

Why is binge drinking dangerous?

As you can imagine, binge drinking is linked to health and relationship problems.¹ But drinking large amounts of alcohol in a short period of time can lead to alcohol poisoning. Signs of alcohol poisoning include:²

- Vomiting
- Slow or irregular breathing
- Seizures
- Inability to wake up

Alcohol poisoning can lead to death because alcohol is a depressant. So it slows down your body's functions. It can slow down your body so much that it stops your breathing or your heart.

Since alcohol also impacts your balance and decision making, binge drinking often leads to accidents. This can include falls, car crashes or workplace accidents.

Drinking heavily and then reporting to work can cause a host of problems. Still drunk or hung over, workers might fall asleep, perform badly, get into conflicts or cause injuries.

Do you have a problem with binge drinking?

Most people who binge drink don't have alcohol dependence.⁵ So if you only drink on weekends, for example, it might be easy to think your binge drinking isn't a problem. But this kind of justification can be a red flag. If you notice you often tell yourself or others that your drinking is "no big deal," you may want to look again.

Even if you don't feel like you need alcohol or you don't drink each day, watch for these warning signs:

- Do you tend to drink quickly?
- Do you regularly drink more than the recommended amount?
- Do you drink to get drunk?
- Has anyone told you that you drink too much?
- Do you black out sometimes?

If you find that it's hard for you to stop drinking once you start, you may have a problem with binge drinking or alcohol dependence. If you want to learn more about your use, you can go to [alcoholscreening.org](https://www.alcoholscreening.org) and take a personal screening.

Where can you go for help?

Binge drinking is dangerous and can lead to alcohol dependence. If you're worried about your alcohol use, you may want to learn more. Here are some resources:

- Your primary care doctor
- Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
- Alcoholics Anonymous ([aa.org](https://www.aa.org))
- National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc. ([ncaddms.org](https://www.ncaddms.org))

You can't control COVID-19, the economy or other people. But you can control how you cope. Alcohol is not the solution.

Reach out to us and we'll help you find a healthy way to manage through these tough times.

⁵Reinberg, Steven. [Many people who drink a lot aren't alcoholics](#); CDC, Web MD. Accessed May 2020.

The EAP is administered by Resources For Living, LLC.

All EAP calls are confidential, except as required by law. Information is not a substitute for diagnosis or treatment by a professional. Contact a professional with any questions about specific needs.