

## FACT SHEET 1 Alcohol



### Takapuna Grammar School International Department

***There are a lot of myths and legends out there about drinking and alcohol, some of which are correct, many which are not. Get your facts straight here and you'll never be misinformed again.***

#### **What exactly is alcohol anyway?**

Alcohol, technically speaking, is a chemical compound, formula =  $C_2H_5OH$ . Most of the family of alcohols are totally poisonous to the human body, but the kind we drink, called ethyl alcohol, is tolerable in small amounts.

#### **Where does it come from?**

Alcohol comes from fruit and vegetables that are fermented (left to rot) with sugar, water and yeast. Over time, this unattractive mixture produces carbon dioxide (the bubbles) and alcohol.

#### **What are we drinking?**

Most kiwis drink beer, which has an alcohol content of around 5% (light beers have less). We also drink wine (12% alcohol), fortified wines like port or sherry (18%) and spirits like vodka, bourbon and gin (40%).

#### **Did you know alcohol is fattening?**

A standard drink has 70 calories in the alcohol alone and then we add a mixe.. Some people describe alcohol as a food, but it isn't. It has so little in the way of proteins and vitamins that it could never replace food in the human diet.

#### **Who's drinking how much?**

A survey of youth aged 14-18 found that: 20% said that they didn't drink at all. 46% said that the last time they drank, they had between 1 and 4 drinks. 36% claimed to have drunk more than 5 drinks the last time they had a drink.

So, you've had a great night out with the gang. Everybody has had a good time and

has stumbled home to bed. It feels so good to crash out, but why do you feel so bad in the morning?

#### **Hangovers**

We've all heard of it, but what causes all that suffering?

The exact cause of hangovers is not totally understood, although the pounding headache is caused by dehydration. The other symptoms - like throwing up, feeling sick or depressed and general grouchiness - are most likely caused by all the other stuff that goes into drinks.

Small amounts of additives (called congeners by those in the know) give drinks their colour, flavour and smell. Congeners affect everyone differently and may contribute to you feeling sick.

#### **Dehydration**

Basically, unless you drink lots of water, alcohol is gonna make you dehydrated. If you drink lots of alcohol and no water your kidneys work hard and cause you to go to the toilet. The more this happens, the more you'll get dehydrated. That hangover isn't going to be pretty.

#### **When you drink, you have to accept that:**

- Alcohol might make you lose your inhibitions.
- That might put you in a bad position, where your safety is at risk.
- Drinking might make you feel more confident.
- You might feel braver than normal, making you vulnerable to other bad things like being beaten, raped or robbed, especially if you are alone at night.
- Alcohol makes you feel good and happy.
- The good feeling you get from alcohol will pass if you get sick. Alcohol is a poison and alcohol poisoning is serious. Big drinking sessions are potentially fatal if your blood alcohol level shuts down parts of your brain.
- When you gamble with alcohol, it's not only yourself that you are putting at risk.

Alcohol is often involved in accidents such drowning, falls and house fires. Other people such as your friends, family, the police and hospitals may be affected. Lost

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inhibitions may make you do things you wouldn't normally do, like pick fights with your mates, go with someone who you didn't want to, get talked into committing crimes or driving drunk, or saying things you didn't mean to say.



### **Pregnancy**

When you drink, so does your baby.

Alcohol is carried through the placenta by your blood stream. Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can cause brain damage to your baby and that damage is permanent. This damage is called Foetal Alcohol Syndrome or FAS for short.

If you are planning a pregnancy or are already pregnant, it's best for your baby to drink very little or not at all. No one knows all the facts, but alcohol seems to cause heaps of problems for unborn children. Drinking heavily during your pregnancy is a serious risk to the ongoing health of your child - and therefore yours. Alcohol can cause permanent damage to unborn children and drinking too much at one time seems to be the most harmful.

#### *What can I do?*

If you think or know you are pregnant, do not drink alcohol until after your baby is born. If you have been drinking during your pregnancy, then stop drinking now. It is never too late and stopping now will help your baby be healthy. It is worth it to go without alcohol for a few months to have a healthy baby.

### **Long-term risks**

Over time, alcohol can do pretty bad things to your body.

Dependence on alcohol can be both physical and psychological - that is both your body and your brain.

Physical dependence happens when your body becomes so used to coping with alcohol in its system that it suffers withdrawal when you are not drinking. Psychological dependence is when alcohol gets into your head and becomes the most important thing in your life. It's pretty sad.

### **New Zealand Legal facts**

The government and the police have a lot to say about 'young people' and alcohol. In fact, it's a constant source of debate and the rules always seem to be changing. For all the facts straight up and up to date, check it out here!

#### *The Sale of Liquor Act 1989*

The Sale of Liquor Act 1989 controls the sale and supply of alcohol on or from licensed premises like pubs, bars, restaurants, supermarkets and bottle stores. It contains some rules you need to know about.

#### **18 or over**

If you are 18 or over you can buy alcohol and enter licensed premises in New Zealand as long as you can show photo ID as proof of your age. Acceptable forms of ID are a NZ or overseas passport, a NZ photo driver's licence or a HANZ 18+ card.

#### **Under 18**

If you are under 18 you cannot legally buy or be supplied with alcohol, with two exceptions:

*If it is bought for you by your parent or legal guardian.*

*If it is supplied to you at a private function like a wedding.*

#### **If you break the law**

The rules are strict and there are stiff penalties for breaking the law for both you and the person who supplies you with the alcohol.

If you are under 18 and buy alcohol or are illegally in a licensed premise, you could have to pay a \$200 infringement fee, which is like a traffic ticket. If the police charge you and you go to court, you could be fined up to \$2,000.

If you are found in possession of, or drinking alcohol in a public place (without

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a parent or legal guardian) - you could be charged a \$200 infringement fee or fined up to \$300.

If someone buys alcohol for you - they could be fined up to \$2,000.

If a bar manager or licensee sells or supplies alcohol to you - they could be fined up to \$10,000 or have their licence suspended or both.

### **Playing it safe**

A few tips to make sure you have a good night out.

#### *Sticking together*

You love your mates (most of the time!) and we love them too. So when you're drinking, stick together and look out for each other. It's best if someone in the team isn't going to get too wrecked and they can keep an eye out for the rest.

#### *Share a taxi*

If you don't want to disturb anyone else put some cash aside for a taxi home. If you share, you can save some money as well.

#### *Going it alone*

This is probably not such a crash hot idea. If you have to walk home, try to walk with a friend. Don't let your friends wander off by themselves either, especially if they are less than on to it.

#### *And remember*

Drinking alcohol is your choice and you can choose to make it rad or bad. Sometimes, less is more. Have a few, feel good, but not out of control. Listen to your body and think about your own limit - and tomorrow morning!

### **Assistance**

If it is hard to stop drinking, it might help to talk to someone you trust. Or you could ring the **Alcohol Helpline on 0800 787 797**. They are good listeners and will have some helpful ideas.

If you need help here at Takapuna Grammar School you could talk to

- **The International Dean**
- **The Guidance Counsellors**
- **The Peer Mentoring Team.**