

## Reducing Harm & Finding Help, Continued

in an outpatient setting (when the patient lives at home but goes to treatment.)

There are also recovery support groups and online forums that can help people struggling with alcohol addiction. Alcoholics Anonymous and groups like SMART Recovery or LifeRing are all available to support people with alcohol addiction. Recovery apps specific to alcohol addiction can be downloaded to your smart phone that provide lists of recovery support meetings, reading material, tools like sobriety counters, and more.



# Alcohol



Information about  
Your Health



  
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## Alcohol – What Is It?

Alcohol is made by fermenting grains, fruits, or vegetables. It is drunk as beer, wine, and liquor. Although alcohol use in America is common, about a quarter of Americans drink very rarely or not at all.

Alcohol is a legal drug, but you must be 21 years old to purchase or consume it in the United States.

## Alcohol & My Health

### Shorter term

*Intoxication:* Drinking alcohol slows your reaction time and reduces your coordination. Alcohol use also impairs judgement. These combined factors mean that alcohol use creates a greater risk of accidents, injuries, unhealthy decisions, and violence.

*Overdose:* More alcohol than your body can handle causes an overdose, which can be fatal. An alcohol overdose is often called “alcohol poisoning.” Because alcohol slows

## Alcohol & My Health, Cont.

your body down, it is particularly dangerous to combine alcohol with other drugs that slow your body down, such as benzodiazepines (with brand names like Valium or Xanax) or opioids (medications like Vicodin, Norco or Percocet). Combining alcohol with cocaine also increases overdose risk: the combination of alcohol and cocaine produces a substance called cocaethylene that is more toxic to the body than cocaine alone.

### Longer term

*Addiction:* Alcohol has addictive potential. Not everyone who uses alcohol becomes addicted, but some do. Symptoms of alcohol withdrawal are shaking, sleep problems and nausea. More severe withdrawal symptoms include hallucinations and seizures.

*Other health risks:* Over the long term, drinking often can put you at risk of having a stroke (a brain injury from a blood clot), cancer, or liver disease. Heavy alcohol use can permanently hurt your brain cells, making it hard to walk, remember, or learn new things. Alcohol can also cause interactions with prescribed medications that can cause or worsen health problems.

## Reducing Harm & Finding Help

People who use alcohol can reduce their risk of harm by not driving a car after consuming alcohol. Alcohol is more safely drunk when you avoid using other drugs, especially benzodiazepines, cocaine or opioids. Most overdose deaths involve more than one drug.

### Alcohol and Pregnancy

Drinking during pregnancy can cause lifelong problems for your child. It is recommended that if you are pregnant or wish to become pregnant, you avoid alcohol completely.



There are a number of resources available for people who wish to reduce their drinking. Moderation Management is a support group

<http://www.moderation.org/>

for people who wish to decrease their use, but not stop altogether. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism website offers tips for cutting back.

[www.rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/Thinking-about-a-change](http://www.rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/Thinking-about-a-change)

People who wish to stop using alcohol should be aware that withdrawal can be difficult and in some cases, dangerous. Physicians, detox facilities, and addiction treatment programs can help with withdrawal.

There are medications that a doctor can prescribe you which might make it easier to stop drinking. Acamprosate helps to manage the symptoms of alcohol withdrawal. Naltrexone can reduce urges and cravings for alcohol.

Alcohol addiction can be treated in a residential setting (often called “rehab”) or

