ALCOHOL

COMMON & BRAND NAMES

Liquor; Spirits; Beer; Wine

AKA

Alcohol is also known as drink, grog, piss, booze, juice, liquor, sauce and tinnies.

EFFECTS CLASSIFICATION

Depressant Intoxicant

CHEMICAL NAME

Ethyl-alcohol

DESCRIPTION

Alcohol is one of the most common strong psychoactives used by humans. It has a long history of use and its intoxicating effects are well-studied and -documented.

STANDARD DRINKS:

One drink isn't always one drink - different types of alcoholic drinks contain different amounts of alcohol and are sold or served in different sized glasses or containers. It is important that you know what a standard drink is when you are cutting down or trying to stick to a limit. All standard drinks have approximately 10 grams of pure alcohol - regardless of their volume. All alcoholic beverages, by law, state on the label the number of standard drinks in the container.

DESCRIPTION

Alcohol is an intoxicating substance made from fermented starches. It is the most widely used psychoactive, or mood-changing, recreational drug in Australia. Alcohol is often mistakenly believed to be a stimulant. This is because drinking a small amount of alcohol may initially reduce tension or inhibitions, making a person feel more relaxed or excited. People often drink alcohol at social occasions. However, alcohol is actually a central nervous system depressant that affects almost all a person's cells and systems. Increasing alcohol concentrations in the body inhibits many of the brain's functions, dampening the motor and sensory centres, and rapidly making judgment, coordination and balance more difficult, and slowing one's reflexes. The active drug in all alcoholic drinks is ethanol. This drug is produced as a result of the fermentation of grains (beer), vegetables (vodka), and fruits (wine), changing sugars into ethyl alcohol. Pure alcohol has no taste and is a colourless liquid. Alcoholic drinks vary in appearance and taste due to the other ingredients contained within them and as a result of the method by which they are manufactured. Alcohol only takes a few minutes to reach the brain. It is absorbed directly into the bloodstream through the walls of the stomach and small intestine. and is then quickly distributed to all parts of the body, including the brain. Food in the stomach slows down the rate at which alcohol is absorbed, but does not prevent intoxication or drunkenness, as all alcohol consumed reaches the bloodstream. Sobering up takes time. The liver is the main organ of the body responsible for removing alcohol from the bloodstream. The liver can only work at a fixed rate, taking about an hour to break down the alcohol in a standard drink. Cold showers, exercise, black coffee, fresh air or vomiting will not speed up the process.

DOSE

Reactions and experiences may vary dramatically from person to person.

ALCOHOL

STANDARD DRINKS cont...

- 375ml full strength beer, 4.9% Alc.Vol = 1.5 standard drinks
- 375ml mid strength EFFECTS beer, 3.5% Alc.Vol = 1 standard drinks
- 375ml light beer, 2.75% Alc.Vol =0.8 standard drinks
- 375ml pre mixed spirits, 5% Alc.Vol = 1.5 standard drinks
- 300ml alcoholic soda, 5% Alc.Vol = 1.2 standard drinks
- 700ml bottler of spirits, 40% Alc.Vol = 22 standard drinks
- 750ml bottler of wine, 12% Alc.Vol = 7 standard drinks
- 4 litres cask wine, 12% Alc/Vol = 38 standard drinks

LAW

A person must be 18 years of age to be able to buy and consume alcohol. It is illegal to drive under the influence of alcohol.There are limits to blood alcohol concentration (BAC) for drivers, across Australia. These are:

• checked through random breath testing, by police in every Australian State and Territory;
• 0.05g/100ml for general drivers (with a full licence);
• from 0.00 g/100ml (in South Australia) to under 0.02 g/100ml, for the following categories of drivers:
— those with a learner's or provisional licence,
— those under 25 years of age who have held a licence for less than 3 years,
— drivers in control of a bus, heavy vehicle or vehicle carrying dangerous goods.

The more alcohol that is consumed, the longer it takes for BAC to return to zero. It generally takes about one hour for 1 standard drink to pass through the bloodstream, but after a heavy drinking session, BAC may still be over 0.05 the next morning. While it can vary a lot from person to person, BAC will, in general, remain below 0.05 if a man of average size drinks no more than 2 drinks in the first hour and 1 per hour after that, and if a woman of average size drinks no more than 1 standard drink per hour.

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EFFECTS

The short-term effects of using alcohol may include:

- relaxation
- reduced concentration
- lack of co-ordination and slower reflexes
- loss of inhibitions and more confidence
- flushed appearance
- blurred vision and slurred speech
- intense moods, e.g. aggression, elation, depression
- headache
- nausea, vomiting, sleep
- at high doses – coma and death

Drinking a lot of alcohol regularly over time is likely to cause physical emotional or social problems. These may include: poor diet; stomach problems; frequent infections; skin problems; liver, heart and brain damage; sexual impotence and a reduction in fertility; concentration and short term memory problems; depression; poor work performance; legal and financial difficulties. Damage to some body organs can be permanent.

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DEPENDENCE POTENTIAL

Although drinking a small amount of alcohol is generally not harmful for most people, regular drinking of a lot of alcohol can cause health, personal and social problems for a person over the long-term. People who drink heavily may become dependent on alcohol. There are degrees of dependence, from mild dependency to compulsive drinking (often referred to as 'alcoholism'). Alcohol dependence can be a physical problem, or psychological, or both.

For instance, to some degree many of us are psychologically dependent on alcohol if we feel that we cannot socialise at a party without a drink. In the case of an alcoholic person who is both physically and psychologically dependent, alcohol becomes central to their life. Such a person would suffer withdrawal symptoms such as, tremor, nausea, anxiety, depression, sweating, headache and difficulty sleeping, if they were to try to stop drinking or to cut down the amount they drink.

Content for this fact sheet taken from the Vaults of Erowid – www.erowid.org