Alcohol and Teenagers

Facts about alcohol

Alcohol is a drug that works directly on the central nervous system. Alcohol kills more male teenagers and young men than any other drug taken to affect mood and behavior (heroin, cocaine, marijuana). Despite this alcohol is a legal (for adults) and socially acceptable way of altering mood states - at least in western societies.

Most deaths and injury due to alcohol are caused by the way people behave when under its influence. Men fight more, drive more recklessly, and engage in more risky behaviors. Alcohol use is a leading risk factor for the three leading causes of death among youth: unintentional injuries (including motor vehicle crashes and drownings), suicides; and homicides. Alcohol also puts you at greater risk from sexual behavior where you find you have more than you had planned on - a sexually transmitted disease or an unwanted pregnancy!

Alcohol intake and teen health

Because the body changes so much as we grow, the ability both to judge and cope with alcohol changes all the time. Everyone seems to know of someone who can drink booze by the bucket-load but this shouldn't be seen as something to aspire towards. Teens are the most likely group to have their stomachs pumped after excessive alcohol intake. At the end of the day it has to be remembered that alcohol is a toxin.

Effects of excessive Alcohol on young bodies

- Youthful 'immature' organs can literally be poisoned by alcohol.
- The liver can be damaged. It takes a few days for it to recover and to get back to normal functioning after a 'session'.
- The heart can beat so irregularly that it can stop.
- The body can lose temperature causing hypothermia. Every year some teens die when they get drunk and pass out in the freezing cold.
- Too little sugar in the body can cause coma and seizures.
- Breathing can become so shallow or slow that it can stop.
- One of the most common ways in which teens (and adults) die from alcohol is by choking on their own vomit. If you vomit when you are unconscious you can easily breath it in. If your body cannot get the oxygen it needs brain damage or death results.

**Knowing when to stop drinking alcohol**

One of the dangers of drinking is not recognizing when you have had too much. Different drinks have varying alcohol content and the body reacts differently to alcohol according to whether or not you have eaten, how thirsty you are, even the time of day it is. Even if you stop drinking the level of alcohol can continue increasing. No amount of coffee, cold baths, showers, or trying to walk it off will stop it.

Taking a meal before drinking only slows the process. Once alcohol gets to the small intestine the effects kick in. The only thing that reverses the effect of alcohol is time.

**Emergency help for alcohol poisoning**

If someone is becoming unconscious and also has shallow breathing and/or is looking blue, has a slow heart beat and maybe starts to vomit, get urgent medical assistance. Phone emergency services(911 US or 999 UK). Better to be safe than have a damaged or dead friend.

All this stuff may sound dramatic but ask your parents if they ever knew or heard of someone badly affected by booze. I remember 3 guys; one died, one has permanent brain damage and one lost a leg in a motor bike accident.