

Fact or Myth?

This fact sheet addresses some of the common myths and misconceptions held by parents and teenagers about alcohol...

Fact or myth?

- › 'It's cool to drink.'
- › 'People will think I'm a loser if I don't have a drink.'
- › 'It's all part of growing up!'

Answer: Myth

You don't have to drink to be cool or to be an adult. In fact it is safer if you don't.

Young people who establish heavy and excessive drinking patterns in adolescence are more likely to continue drinking at these levels as adults. This increases their risk of suffering from the long-term health consequences such as cirrhosis, cancer and other harms (see www.druginfo.adf.org.au for more information).

Fact or myth?

- › 'Everyone drinks on a special occasion.'
- › 'I have to have a drink to celebrate.'
- › 'You can't have a good time without alcohol!'

Answer: Myth

In fact, many Australians don't drink, or rarely drink alcohol.

In 2006 approximately 20% of Australians didn't drink alcohol and another 33.5% had an alcoholic drink on a less-than-weekly basis.

Many people choose to celebrate significant events with healthy food and drinks. A multitude of non-alcoholic drink options are available, including fruit juices, soft drinks, tea and coffee. Making fruit-based 'mocktails' can be a fun way to explore non-alcohol options and to create your own drinks for special occasions. The costs will also be significantly lower than serving alcoholic drinks.

Another option is to consider serving only low-alcohol content beverages.

Fact or myth?

- › 'You're the only parent who won't let me drink.'
- › 'I'm the only teenager who isn't allowed to have a drink.'
- › 'Everyone drinks!'

Answer: Myth

Not all teenagers drink alcohol.

In 2005, a survey of Australian secondary school students found that 52% of all students aged 12–17 were non-drinkers, while 23% were occasional drinkers and 19% said they were party drinkers.

While experimenting with alcohol is often considered 'normal' during adolescence, this doesn't mean that it is safe, nor does it mean that parents have to accept teenage drinking.

For tips on communicating with your teenager about alcohol, see **Fact sheet 7: Teenage drinking: parents' communication style can make a difference.**

Research has shown that alcohol can be particularly harmful during adolescence, especially in relation to brain development. For more information see **Fact sheet 1: Alcohol and adolescent development.**

Fact or myth?

- › 'At least he/she isn't out there taking drugs. They're only having a drink. That can't be too dangerous.'

Answer: Myth

Alcohol is a drug. It is a major contributing cause of death and hospitalisations for young Australians.

There were an estimated 2,643 deaths of Australians 15-24 years over the last ten years from alcohol-attributed injury and disease, with road injury, suicide and violence the cause of most of these deaths.

There were 101,165 alcohol related hospitalisations in the last nine years (22% of all hospitalisations for that age group).

Young people 15-24 years account for 52% of all alcohol-related serious road injuries and 32% of all hospitalisations from injuries related to alcohol use and violence.

For more information on the harms associated with alcohol, see **Fact sheet 1: Alcohol and adolescent development** and **Fact sheet 3: Standard drinks and low-risk drinking.**





Fact or myth?

'It's cheaper to get drunk on an empty stomach.'
'If you don't eat you get drunk quicker and it's cheaper.'

Answer: Fact

You will get drunk quicker on an empty stomach.

The cost depends on the type of drink you purchase.

Some young people avoid eating so they can have a 'flat tummy' when they go out.

Alcohol is absorbed directly into the bloodstream through the stomach and the small intestine. Food in the stomach slows down the rate at which alcohol is absorbed.

Drinking alcohol on an empty stomach makes the person more vulnerable to becoming intoxicated—and to the consequences. A teenager can suffer the same effects by drinking only half as much as an adult.

For more information see **Fact sheet 1: Alcohol and adolescent development**.

Fact or myth?

'Drinking milk (or yoghurt) before having alcohol lines your stomach so you don't get drunk or throw up.'

'Eating certain types of food like plain white bread while you drink helps to soak up the alcohol so you can drink more.'

Answer: Myth

All alcohol consumed will reach the bloodstream, regardless of how much food the person eats or what else he/she drinks.

Bread and other food in the stomach slows down the rate at which alcohol is absorbed, but does not prevent intoxication, or drunkenness.

It also takes time for alcohol to leave the body. That's why drinking coffee or having a cold shower does little to help you 'sober up'.

For information about how alcohol is absorbed into the body and how it leaves the body, see **www.druginfo.adf.org.au**.

Fact or myth?

'It's okay for me to drink heaps tonight because I haven't had a drink all week.'

'I can drink my weekly 'quota' of alcohol in one night.'

Answer: Myth

'Saving up' drinks for a binge can be harmful.

'Binge drinking' means drinking heavily over a short period of time, drinking continuously over a number of days or weeks, or drinking to get drunk. For young people, the short-term risks of binge drinking include alcohol poisoning, getting drunk, getting into fights, having accidents, having unsafe/unwanted sex, or doing something they regret the next day. Binge drinking is particularly harmful in adolescence.

(see **Fact sheet 1: Alcohol and adolescent development** and **Fact sheet 3: Standard drinks and low-risk drinking**).

Fact or myth?

'Having cornflakes with beer (instead of milk) is a good cure for a hangover.'

Answer: Myth

This is a version of the myth about the 'hair of the dog' being good for a hangover.

Having more alcohol to 'cure' a hangover may help for a while because the person's body stops processing the previous night's alcohol, to digest the new alcohol. However, all alcohol in a person's body has to be processed sooner or later.

Symptoms of a hangover include nausea, headache and hunger. The person feels like this because alcohol has a dehydrating effect. He/she would be better off drinking lots of water.

Depending on how much the person has drunk, a hangover can last for 24 hours.

Further information

- › For additional copies of this fact sheet see http://www.olgc.sa.gov.au/default.asp?page=general.Youth_Issues.htm&menu=general or <http://www.decs.sa.gov.au/drugstrategy> >resources or parent support

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