



Deep Digging:

What Happens When People Drink too Much at Any Age

Most middle school students don't drink. But some do, and this can lead to serious troubles.

By drinking too much at any age, people can dig themselves into holes of trouble. Some dig faster than others and have problems more quickly. They can lose friends, fall behind at school or work, or harm their health.



Hole #1

Losing friends: Friends start pulling back or drifting away. Only friends who drink alcohol will stick around.



Hole #2

Problems at school: Being late, missing days, not working up to abilities, and putting off responsibilities are just a few of the problems. Falling behind happens first, which can lead to poor school performance.



Hole #3

Injuries and Organ Damage: Heavy drinking can damage the body's organs, including the brain. It can also cause many other serious problems, including life-threatening injuries as well as alcohol use disorder.



Hole #4

Money problems: Spending too much on alcohol and to pay for problems or poor decisions caused by drinking can increase money troubles.



Hole #5

Drinking to try to escape problems: People who misuse alcohol often feel misunderstood, unfairly treated, harassed, or just plain unlucky. As things get worse, they may be more likely to drink, which will make the problems bigger and dig their holes even deeper.



National Institute
on Alcohol Abuse
and Alcoholism

Will You Survive?

There's no question that years of heavy drinking can seriously damage health and even lead to death. But some of the dangers are right in the here and now.

Alcohol can harm judgment, coordination, and reflexes. It can cause people to lose control, take chances, and do things they never would do otherwise.

As a result, young people who drink can be injured or killed, even the first time they try alcohol.

In fact, **alcohol is linked** with an estimated **4,000 deaths** in people **under age 21** each year.

Deadly car crashes. Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death in people ages 15 to 20. Deadly crashes involving alcohol are twice as common in people under 21, compared with people 21 and older. That's because young people are not as experienced with driving, and their judgment skills are harmed more by alcohol, even if they drink less than adults.

Alcohol overdose and other deaths. Underage drinking has also been linked with deaths and injuries from burns, falls, and suicide. Alcohol overdose, also called "alcohol poisoning," occurs when there is so much alcohol in the bloodstream that areas of the brain controlling basic life-support functions—such as breathing, heart rate, and temperature control—begin to shut down.

Will Others Survive?

Young people who drink not only risk hurting themselves. They risk hurting their friends, family, and people they have never even met. Young people who drive under the influence of alcohol are more likely than adults to kill someone else, whether it's passengers in their cars, people in other cars, or pedestrians.

When Drinking Becomes a Disorder

When people drink too much, with time they increase their risk of developing alcohol use disorder (AUD). AUD is a condition that healthcare professionals diagnose when a patient's drinking pattern causes significant distress or harm. AUD can be mild, moderate, or severe, and it encompasses the conditions that some people refer to as alcohol abuse, alcohol dependence, alcohol addiction, and the commonly used term, alcoholism. AUD can cause lasting changes in the brain that make patients vulnerable to relapse.

It may be hard to imagine why people with AUD can't just "use a little willpower" to stop drinking. But severe AUD creates an uncontrollable need for alcohol. It can be as strong as the need for food and water. People may want to stop because they know that drinking harms their health and their loved ones. But quitting can be extremely difficult.

Work It Out

It's easy to see why using alcohol as a solution to problems, or a way of trying to cope, is trouble. Drinking should never take the place of talking things through and working out difficulties in other ways.