

## BINGE DRINKING

For many students, spring break is a carefree time away from classroom pressures. Unfortunately, for many it is also a time of excessive drinking and dealing with its aftermath – violence, sexual aggression, and even death.<sup>1</sup>

That old joke about going out drinking to kill a few brain cells may not be so funny any more. Young people who binge drink could be risking serious damage to their brains now and increasing memory loss later in adulthood. Adolescents may be even more vulnerable to brain damage from excessive drinking than older drinkers.<sup>2</sup>

What is binge drinking? Binge drinking is a 5-drink standard for males and a 4-drink standard for females within 2 hours or less. Alcohol acts as both a stimulant and a depressant. While people who drink may temporarily feel elated and happy, the feeling doesn't last and alcohol's depressive effects take over.

- Their inhibitions and memory soon become affected, so they could say and do things they might regret or might not remember doing at all.
- Their decision-making skills are also affected. They may become restless and aggressive. They may be more inclined to get into fights, trash a house, or make unwise decisions about sex.
- Their physical control is affected as well – they can experience loss of balance, slurred speech, or blurred vision.
- Critical driving skills and decision-making abilities are diminished long before someone begins to show the obvious physical signs of intoxication.
- Young people are less sensitive than older adults to alcohol's effects on alertness, so they can drink longer before feeling drowsy. Under the influence of alcohol, even normal activities such as swimming, running, or just crossing a busy street can become truly dangerous – and potentially life-threatening.

### Understand Alcohol Poisoning

Alcohol depresses the nerves that control breathing and the gag reflex, which prevents choking. Someone who drinks a fatal dose of alcohol will eventually stop breathing. Even someone who survives an alcohol overdose can suffer irreversible brain damage. Binge drinking, which often happens with a bet or a dare, is especially dangerous because the victim can drink a fatal dose **before** losing consciousness.

Blood alcohol concentration can continue to rise while someone is passed out. Also, even after a person stops drinking, the alcohol already in the stomach and the intestine continues to enter the bloodstream and circulates throughout the body. Someone who appears to be sleeping it off could actually be in real danger.<sup>1</sup>

### What Should You Look For:

Signs of alcohol poisoning include

- mental confusion
- vomiting
- bluish skin color
- stupor
- seizures
- unconsciousness
- coma
- paleness
- hypothermia
- inability to be roused
- fewer than eight breaths/minute
- irregular breathing (10 seconds or more between breaths)

If you suspect an alcohol overdose/poisoning, don't wait for all the critical signs to appear. Call 911 immediately!<sup>1</sup>

1 NIAAA – National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, NIH Publication #05-5642, 3/06  
2 *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research Journal*, 2006 About, Inc.