



Summer is typically a wonderful season for outdoor activities and spending additional time with family and friends. For some people, these activities include drinking alcohol beverages. This summer, take measures to protect your own health and that of your loved ones.

Swimmers Can Get in Over Their Heads

More drownings occur in July than in any other month.¹ Many of these deaths involve alcohol—a recent study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

estimates that 31% of all drownings involve blood alcohol concentration (BAC) levels of 0.10% or higher.² Alcohol impairs judgment and increases risk-taking, a dangerous combination for swimmers. Even experienced swimmers may venture out farther than they should and not be able to make it back to shore, or they may not notice how chilled they're getting and develop hypothermia. Surfers could become overconfident and try to ride a wave beyond their abilities. Even around a pool, alcohol can have tragic consequences. Inebriated divers may collide with the diving board or dive where the water is too shallow.

Boaters Can Lose Their Bearings

The U.S. Coast Guard reports that alcohol consumption contributes to 18% of boating deaths in which the primary cause is known, making alcohol the leading known contributor of fatal boating accidents.³ CDC also estimates that 27% of deaths involving boats, jet skis, and other forms of water transportation involve individuals with a BAC of 0.10% or higher.² A boat operator with a BAC of 0.08% or higher is 14 times more likely to be killed in a boating accident than an operator with no alcohol in their system. Reaching a 0.08% BAC would require about four drinks in 2 hours for an average-size woman (171 pounds) or five drinks in 2 hours for an average-size man (198 pounds).^{*} Individuals who have had bariatric surgery may reach 0.08% BAC with fewer drinks. It is important to note that the odds of a fatal crash begin to increase with the first drink.⁴

In addition, according to the U.S. Coast Guard and the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators, alcohol can impair a boater's judgment, balance, vision, and reaction time. It can also increase fatigue and susceptibility to the effects of cold-water immersion. If problems arise,



^{*} Individual factors such as drinking on an empty stomach may influence how quickly someone reaches a 0.08% BAC.

intoxicated boaters are ill-equipped to respond quickly and find solutions. For passengers, intoxication can lead to slips on deck, falls overboard, or accidents at the dock.

Drivers Can Go Off Course

The summer holidays are some of the most dangerous times of the year to be on the road. When on vacation, drivers may be traveling an unfamiliar route or hauling a boat or camper, with the distraction of pets and children in the car. Adding alcohol to the mix puts the lives of the driver and everyone in the car, as well as other people on the road, at risk.

Dehydration Is a Risk

Whether you're on the road or in the great outdoors, heat plus alcohol can equal trouble. Hot summer days cause fluid loss through perspiration, while alcohol causes fluid loss through increased urination. Together, they can quickly lead to dehydration or heat stroke.

Protect Your Skin

Sunburns can put a damper on summer vacations. People who drink alcohol while celebrating in the sun are less likely to wear sunscreen.^{5,6} And laboratory research suggests that alcohol lowers the amount of sun exposure needed to produce burns.⁷

This is all bad news, as repeated sunburns increase the risk of skin cancer. Whether drinking or not, be sure to slather on the sunscreen to maximize your summer fun!

Stay Safe and Stay Healthy

Be smart this summer—think before you drink. Avoiding alcohol beverages while piloting a boat, driving a car, exploring the wilderness, and swimming or surfing can also help keep you and your loved ones safe.

If you're serving alcohol, be sure to:

- » Provide a variety of healthy foods and snacks.
- » Offer various non-alcohol-containing beverages.
- » Help your guests get home safely—use designated drivers, ride-hailing services, or taxis.

And if you are a parent, understand the underage drinking laws—and set a good example.



So what's in that drink, exactly?

Summer cocktails may be stronger, more caloric, and more expensive than you realize. You may be watching what you eat so you can fit into those summer clothes, but watching what you drink can keep you safe.

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism's (NIAAA) alcohol calculators can help you assess calories, drink size, alcohol spending, blood alcohol levels, and the number of standard drinks in each cocktail.

Visit:
[RethinkingDrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/
tools/calculators](https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/tools/calculators)

For more information on preventing problems with alcohol this summer, and tips on cutting back, visit: [RethinkingDrinking.niaaa.nih.gov](https://www.niaaa.nih.gov)

- ¹ National Safety Council [Internet]. Injury facts: preventable deaths, deaths by month. Preventable deaths by month for select causes, 2021. [cited 2023 May 30]. Available from: <https://injuryfacts.nsc.org/all-injuries/preventable-death-overview/deaths-by-month>
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- ³ U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Coast Guard. 2020 Recreational boating statistics. [cited 2023 May 30]. Available from: <https://www.uscgboating.org/library/accident-statistics/Recreational-Boating-Statistics-2020.pdf>
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- ⁶ Mukamal KJ. Alcohol consumption and self-reported sunburn: a cross-sectional, population-based survey. *J Am Acad Dermatol.* 2006;55(4):584-9. PubMed PMID: [17010736](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17010736/)
- ⁷ Darvin ME, Sterry W, Lademann J, Patzelt A. Alcohol consumption decreases the protection efficiency of the antioxidant network and increases the risk of sunburn in human skin. *Skin Pharmacol Physiol.* 2012;26(1):45–51. PubMed PMID: [23147451](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/23147451/)

