

# TIPS for TEENS

## UNDERAGE DRINKING

### THE TRUTH ABOUT UNDERAGE DRINKING



**SLANG<sup>1</sup>: BOOZE/BREW/  
LIQUOR/SAUCE**

## GET THE FACTS

**UNDERAGE DRINKING IS DANGEROUS.** Drinking alcohol can result in poor decision making which can make you less aware of your actions and unable to recognize potential danger. Drinking may also lead to impaired motor coordination, placing you at a greater risk of being injured from falls or vehicle crashes. While intoxicated, you are more likely to engage in unsafe behavior, including drinking and driving, unprotected sex, and aggressive or violent actions.<sup>2</sup>

**UNDERAGE DRINKING CAN BE FATAL.** When a person has an alcohol overdose, their breathing and heart rate slows down to dangerous levels. Symptoms include confusion, being unconscious, vomiting, seizures, and trouble breathing. Overdosing on alcohol can lead to permanent brain damage or death. In addition, driving after drinking alcohol can lead to vehicle accidents and deaths.<sup>3</sup>

**UNDERAGE DRINKING CAN BE ADDICTIVE.** When someone is unable to stop or control their alcohol use—even when facing serious health, social, or academic consequences—they have an alcohol use disorder that requires treatment. Talking with a counselor, psychologist, psychiatrist, or other trained professional can help.<sup>4</sup>

## ? Q&A

**Q. IS IT REALLY UNSAFE TO DRINK UNTIL I'M 21?**

**A. YES.** The risks of underage drinking are high. Research suggests that drinking during the teen years could interfere with normal brain development and increase the risk of developing an alcohol use disorder later in life.<sup>5</sup>

**Q. WHY DO MY FRIENDS DRINK ALCOHOL IF IT IS UNSAFE?**

**A.** Many teens experience peer pressure to drink alcohol, and some are looking for a way to cope with stress; however, underage drinking will result in more problems—not fewer. In 2019, about 4.2 million young people aged 12 to 20 reported binge drinking (for males, 5 or more drinks, and for females, 4 or more drinks on the same occasion within a few hours) at least once in the past month.<sup>6</sup>

**Q. MY PARENTS USED TO DRINK WHEN THEY WERE UNDERAGE. WHY CAN'T I?**

**A.** Minimum drinking age laws exist for a reason—they help keep everyone safer. After states increased the legal drinking age to 21, there were fewer car crashes. Also, drinking during the previous month for 18- to 20-year-olds declined after all states adopted a minimum legal drinking age of 21, from 59 percent in 1985 to 40 percent in 1991.<sup>7</sup>

### THE BOTTOM LINE:

Underage drinking is dangerous and can be deadly. Talk to your parents, a doctor, a counselor, a teacher, or another adult you trust if you have questions.

### LEARN MORE:

Get the latest information on how underage drinking affects the brain and body at [teens.drugabuse.gov](https://teens.drugabuse.gov).

### TO LEARN MORE ABOUT UNDERAGE DRINKING PREVENTION, CONTACT:

**SAMHSA**

**1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727)** (English and Español)

**TTY 1-800-487-4889**

[www.samhsa.gov](https://www.samhsa.gov) | [store.samhsa.gov](https://store.samhsa.gov)



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