



The Truth About Holiday Spirits

Many of us look forward to celebrations during the holidays, a time when some people are more likely to drink beyond their limits than at other times of the year. Some will suffer adverse consequences that range from fights to falls to traffic crashes. Sadly, we often put ourselves and others at risk because we don't understand how alcohol affects us during an evening of celebratory drinking.

Myths Persist

Despite the potential dangers, myths about drinking persist, which—for some—can prove fatal. Scientific studies supported by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism provide important information that challenges these widespread, yet incorrect, beliefs about how quickly alcohol affects the body and how long the effects of drinking last.

Alcohol's Effects Begin Quickly

Holiday revelers may not recognize that critical decision-making abilities and driving-related skills are already diminished long before a person shows physical signs of intoxication.

Initially, alcohol acts as a stimulant, so people who drink may feel upbeat and excited. But don't be fooled. Alcohol soon decreases inhibitions and judgment, and can lead to reckless decisions.

As we consume more alcohol, reaction time suffers and behavior becomes poorly controlled and sometimes even aggressive—leading to fights and other types of violence. Continued drinking causes the slurred speech and loss of balance that we typically associate with being drunk. At these levels and above, alcohol can also cause blackouts—which are when a person does not remember what happened while he or she was intoxicated. At higher levels, alcohol acts as a depressant, which causes the drinker to become sleepy and in some cases pass out. At even higher levels, drinkers face the danger of life-threatening alcohol overdose due to the suppression of vital life functions.

