



# UNDERAGE DRINKING

## MYTHS —VERSUS— FACTS

You probably see and hear a lot about alcohol—from TV, movies, music, social media, and your friends. But what are the real facts? Here are some common myths and facts about alcohol use.

**MYTH** All of the other kids drink alcohol.  
You need to drink to fit in.

**FACT** Don't believe the hype: Most young people don't drink alcohol! Research shows that almost 85 percent of 12- to 20-year-olds haven't had a drink in the past month.<sup>1</sup>

**MYTH** Drinking alcohol will make people like you.

**FACT** There's nothing likable about stumbling around, passing out, or puking on yourself. Drinking alcohol can also make your breath smell bad.

**MYTH** Drinking is a good way to loosen up at parties.

**FACT** Drinking is a dumb way to loosen up. It can make you act foolish, say things you shouldn't say, and do things you wouldn't normally do. In fact, drinking can increase the likelihood of fights and risky sexual activity.<sup>2</sup>

**MYTH** Alcohol isn't as harmful as other drugs.

**FACT** Your brain doesn't stop growing until about age 25, and drinking can affect how it develops.<sup>3</sup> Plus, alcohol increases your risk for many diseases, such as cancer.<sup>4</sup> It can also cause you to have accidents and get injured, sending you to the emergency room.<sup>5</sup>

**MYTH** Beer and wine are safer than liquor.

**FACT** Alcohol is alcohol. A 12-ounce beer, a 5-ounce glass of wine, and a shot of liquor (1.5 ounces) all have the same amount of alcohol.<sup>6</sup>

**MYTH** You can sober up quickly by taking a cold shower or drinking coffee.

**FACT** There's no magic cure to help you sober up. One drink can take at least an hour to leave your body and sometimes takes even longer.<sup>7</sup> And there's nothing you can do to make that happen quicker.

**MYTH** There's no reason to wait until you're 21 to drink.

**FACT** When you're young, drinking alcohol can make learning new things more difficult.<sup>8</sup> Also, people who begin drinking before they turn 15 are more likely to develop a drinking problem at some point in their lives than those who begin drinking at age 21 or older.<sup>9</sup>

**MYTH** You can drink alcohol and you won't get into trouble.

**FACT** All states and Washington, D.C., have 21-year-old minimum-drinking-age laws.<sup>10</sup> If you get caught drinking, you might have to pay a fine, do community service, take alcohol awareness classes, or even spend time in jail.



## Think you or your friend has an alcohol problem?

Don't wait—get help. Talk to a parent, doctor, teacher, or anyone you trust.

If you're more comfortable speaking with someone you don't know, call the confidential SAMHSA National Helpline at 800-662-HELP (800-662-4357) (English and Spanish). You can find substance misuse treatment services near you by visiting SAMHSA's Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator at [findtreatment.gov](https://www.findtreatment.gov).

**MORE  
INFO**

Learn more about underage drinking at  
[stopalcoholabuse.gov](https://www.stopalcoholabuse.gov).

<sup>1</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2022). *Key substance use and mental health indicators in the United States: Results from the 2021 National Survey on Drug Use and Health* (HHS Publication No. PEP22-07-01-005, NSDUH Series H-57). Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. Retrieved from <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/report/2021-nsduh-annual-national-report>

<sup>2</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2022). *Report to Congress on the Prevention and Reduction of Underage Drinking*. Retrieved from <https://www.stopalcoholabuse.gov/about-iccpud/data/national-reports/report-to-congress/default.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2016). *Facing Addiction in America: The Surgeon General's Report on Alcohol, Drugs, and Health*. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK424857>

<sup>4</sup> National Cancer Institute. (2020). *Cancer Trends Progress Report: Alcohol Consumption*. Retrieved from <https://www.progressreport.cancer.gov/prevention/alcohol>

<sup>5</sup> Naeger, S. (2017). Emergency department visits involving underage alcohol use: 2010 to 2013. *The CBHSQ Report*. Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Rockville, MD. Retrieved from [https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/report\\_3061/ShortReport-3061.html](https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/report_3061/ShortReport-3061.html)

<sup>6</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020). *Alcohol and Public Health: Frequently Asked Questions About Alcohol*. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/faqs.htm>

<sup>7</sup> Cederbaum, A. I. (2012). Alcohol metabolism. *Clinics in Liver Disease*, 16(4), 667–685. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3484320/>

<sup>8</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2022). *Report to Congress on the Prevention and Reduction of Underage Drinking*. Retrieved from <https://www.stopalcoholabuse.gov/about-iccpud/data/national-reports/report-to-congress/default.aspx>

<sup>9</sup> Grant, B. F., & Dawson, D. A. (1997). Age at onset of alcohol use and its association with DSM-IV alcohol abuse and dependence: Results from the National Longitudinal Alcohol Epidemiologic Survey. *Journal of Substance Abuse*, 9, 103–110.

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2016). *Facing Addiction in America: The Surgeon General's Report on Alcohol, Drugs, and Health*. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK424857>