

Alcohol, Tobacco, and Drugs

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PERFECTION LEARNING[®]

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Down the Drain

Alcohol and Your Body

You have probably seen a cartoon in which a mouse or cat falls into a barrel of alcohol. The next thing you know, the silly animal has the hiccups and is walking around doing funny things. The truth is, alcohol is not that funny.

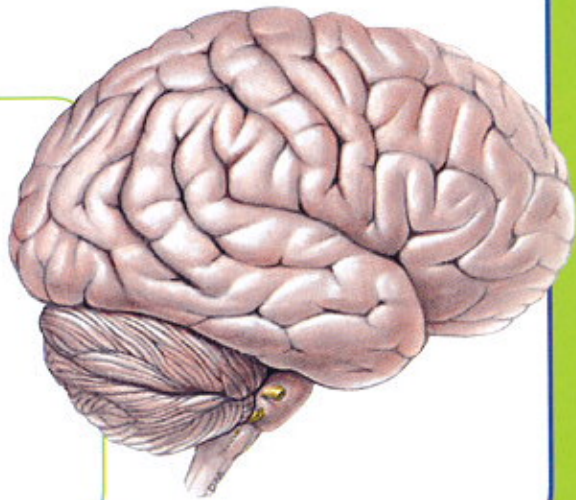
What Is Alcohol?

Alcohol is a drug. A drug is a chemical that changes the

way your body works. Alcohol is a **depressant** that slows down your brain, making you feel more relaxed. But it does more than just relax your brain. It kills brain cells. That's what's happening when people who are drinking lose their balance, have difficulty speaking, and do foolish things.

What Are Brain Cells?

You were born with a certain number of brain cells. Your brain cells make connections with one another. These connections make you able to learn. When your brain cells die (or you kill them by drinking alcohol), they are not replaced.



The Drug of Choice

Alcohol is consumed more frequently among teens than all other illegal drugs combined.

If you drink too much, you become **intoxicated**, or drunk. This may cause you to become sick and vomit or even pass out or become unconscious. But the problems don't end once you've woken up. When you wake up, you will likely have a **hangover**. You will have a horrible headache and a very upset stomach. You may even vomit again. This lasts for hours. Unfortunately, when children and teenagers drink, most drink in order to get drunk. Imagine *choosing* to feel sick!

Taking Drinking to the Extreme

Drinking five or more drinks in a row is called *binge drinking*.

Drinking too much in a short time can give you more than a headache. It can actually kill you. This is called **alcohol poisoning**. It may start with **vomiting**. Your brain signals your stomach to get rid of the alcohol because it detects that there is too much in your body. Vomiting is your body's way of getting rid of the poison.



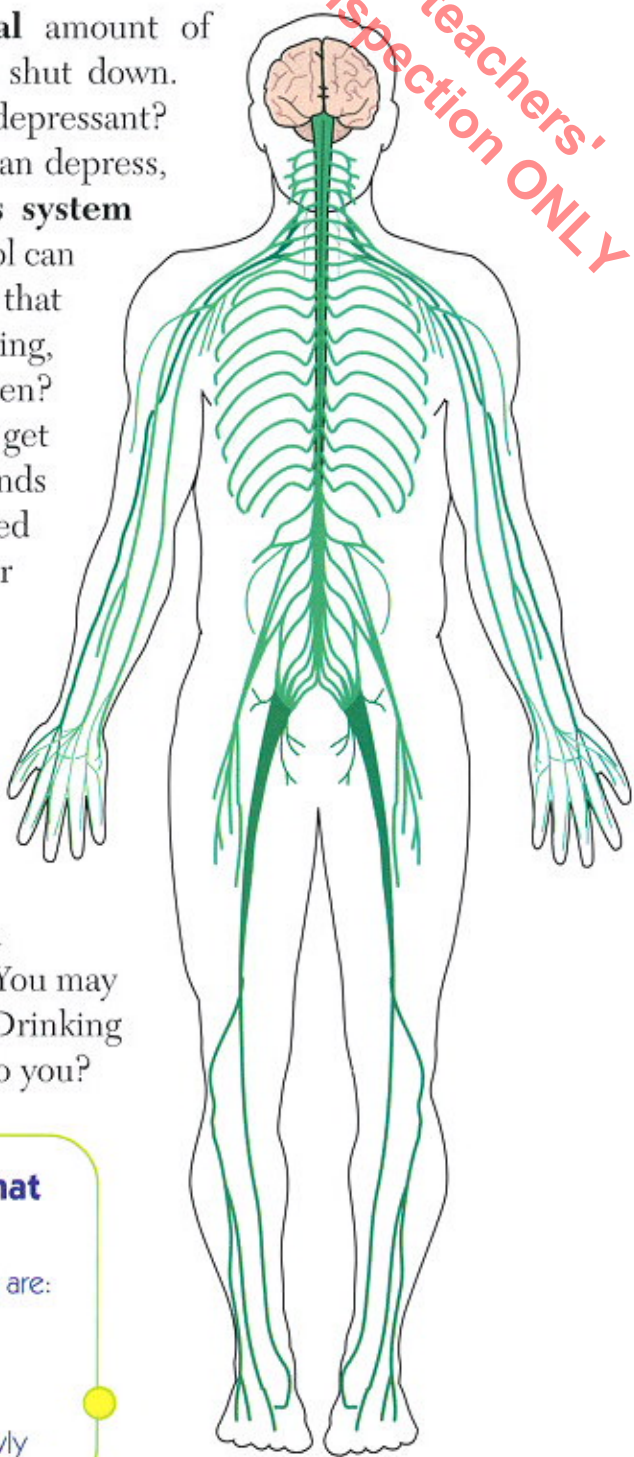
If you have drunk a **lethal** amount of alcohol, your body will start to shut down. Remember how alcohol is a depressant? Well, if you drink too much, it can depress, or relax, your **central nervous system** too much. That means the alcohol can shut off the areas of your brain that control **consciousness**, breathing, and heart rate. What happens then? You fall into a **coma**. If you don't get help in time, you die. Your friends may think you have just passed out. But in reality, you may never wake up.

Another way alcohol poisoning can kill you is when you've already passed out and your brain tells your stomach to make you vomit. If you are too drunk to wake up and clear out your airway, you will choke on the vomit and die. You may hear friends or older kids say, "Drinking is so fun!" Does this sound fun to you?

Alcohol Poisoning—What to Look For

The signs of alcohol poisoning are:

- vomiting
- passing out
- difficulty awakening
- breathing slowly and shallowly



The central nervous system includes the brain and spinal cord.

There are many reasons young people should not drink. Alcohol slows down the healthy development of muscles and bones. If you drink while you are still growing and developing, you may be smaller than other kids. Alcohol makes it harder to fight off diseases because it weakens your **immune system**. That means you are more likely to get sick. Studies also show that if you start young, you are more likely to become hooked. Kids who start drinking before age 15 are four times more likely to become **alcoholics** than their friends who don't drink.

What Is an Alcoholic?

Alcoholics are people who constantly crave alcohol. They are **addicted**. Even though alcohol is bad for them, their brain begins to play tricks on them, sending the message that alcohol is a good thing. Alcoholics are unable to stop drinking without help. Because alcoholism is a disease, it does not go away. Recovering alcoholics are people who, with help, have been able to stop drinking. However, they know that they must never drink alcohol again.

Alcohol Can Kill

Alcohol is involved in the three leading causes of teen deaths—automobile crashes, homicides, and suicides.



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Drugs: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

Humans have been using drugs in one form or another for hundreds and thousands of years. Natural **herbs**, trees, and roots have been used to treat headaches, fevers, and stomach pains. When early pioneers came to America, they brought many herbs from Europe with them, unsure of what they would find in the new land. They planted the herbs and made their own medicines. They also learned

from Native Americans who taught them how to treat different illnesses and injuries with local herbs.

As the settlers learned more about how to use natural herbs, they were able to create powders for pills to fight infections and diseases, treat nerves with teas, and make lotions to soothe rashes and burns. Many of those very herbs are still found in lotions, vitamins, and drugs today.

Take Some Tree Bark and Call Me in the Morning

Native Americans figured out that chewing the inside bark of a willow tree worked as a pain reliever. Today, the aspirin in your medicine cabinet is made from this substance.

