

## Alcohol Fact Sheet

### Description/Overview

Alcohol (ethanol or ethyl alcohol) is one of the most commonly abused drugs in our society. Alcohol:

- Is a Central Nervous System depressant (*slows down body reactions and general brain function*)
- There are two kinds of alcohol:
  - Ethyl - found in “beverage” alcohol (*beer, wine, spirits and liquors*). Ethyl is also present in “non-beverage” alcohol (*rubbing alcohol, mouthwash, cooking wine*)
  - Methyl - found in solvents (*paint removers, antifreeze, household products*)

### Short – Term Effects

- Sense of well being, euphoria and release of inhibitions and tension
- Drowsiness, dizziness and flushing
- Affected speech, balance, and vision
- At higher doses, the effects may be reversed (from euphoria to depression and suicidal behaviour)
- “Hangover” feeling (syndrome of fatigue, headache, nausea, vomiting, and shakiness)

### Long – Term Effects

- Heavy drinking over a long period of time (more than 2 drinks per day) can lead to serious health problems such as:
  - Stomach ulcers, disorders of the pancreas, liver damage/disease
  - Sexual problems/impotence/reproductive problems
  - Brain damage
  - Certain types of cancer
  - Heart disease
  - Blackouts (loss of memory)
- Depression is common
- Disruptions in social, work and family life,
- Financial and legal problems

### Dependence Potential

- Nervous system adapts to the presence of a chronic depressant and *physical dependence develops*
- *Psychological dependence* can also occur, in which users may experience anxiety and even panic when alcohol is not available
- Regular use leads to needing increased doses to produce the desired/same effect (*tolerance*)
- Regular users of alcohol may not appear to be drunk, but it still is not safe for them to drive a car or perform other tasks

### Withdrawal

- Withdrawal effects may range depending upon severity of physical dependence:
- Withdrawal symptoms may include and progress over three stages:
  1. Tremulousness (the shakes), irritability, nausea and vomiting, difficulty sleeping. These symptoms may occur a few hours after drinking stops and peak within 24 to 48 hours and then subside in 2 or 3 days. This is the stage where alcohol hallucinations can occur
  2. Convulsions (seizures) can develop within 24 to 48 hours after stopping heavy drinking. Convulsions can last from 5 to 20 days
  3. Delirium tremens (DTs) is the most serious stage of alcohol withdrawal. Occur 4 or 5 days after heavy/prolonged drinking stops. A person can become extremely confused, agitated and disoriented, with dilated pupils, fever and rapid heart rate

**\*Drinking during pregnancy can result in birth of FASD (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder) children**