

**ALCOHOL POISONING****What is alcohol poisoning?**

Alcohol poisoning is another name for an alcohol overdose—drinking so much that the blood alcohol content (BAC) reaches a level that the body cannot process quickly enough. A BAC level of 0.26 percent to 0.40 percent is potentially lethal to anyone—minors, adults, and even heavy drinkers. The body simply cannot manage such excessive amounts of alcohol.

Rapid drinking on a bet or a dare is especially dangerous because the victim is drinking so quickly that he or she can get a fatal dose into his or her stomach before falling unconscious. Vomiting is the body's way of trying to cope with the excessive toxins in alcohol. Even if the victim throws up, a great deal of alcohol continues to circulate in the bloodstream.

**Stages of alcohol poisoning**

Alcohol is a depressant, which means that it slows down, or depresses, the central nervous system. When a person begins to drink, she feels relaxed and her inhibitions are lowered. As she continues to drink, her balance, coordination and reaction time become impaired. Vision, judgment and speech are also affected.

As the dose increases, a drinker's behavior and speech are even more affected. She enters a confused or dazed state; all her physical and mental abilities are severely impaired. The victim may fall unconscious, but the alcohol in her stomach will continue to enter the bloodstream and circulate.

At this point, the victim may suffer from hypothermia or a slowed respiration rate that leads to a lack of oxygen. Breathing and pulse rate grow slower, become irregular, and may stop. Brain damage, coma, and death may occur.

**How alcohol poisoning kills**

If a victim is not treated promptly, death is a very real possibility. Fatal risks include:

- Hypothermia leading to cardiac arrest
- Hypoglycemia leading to seizures
- Severe dehydration from vomiting
- Choking on his or her own vomit and death by asphyxiation
- Breathing slows down, becomes irregular, and finally stops
- Heartbeat becomes irregular and finally stops

Even if the victim survives, all of the above can result in irreversible brain damage.

*This fact sheet is continued on the next page.*