

How much is too much - Getting the balance right - Key stage 4 (PSHE 14 - 16) accompanying notes for pictorial worksheet

The worksheet and fact sheet are designed to make students think about how much alcohol is appropriate to having a good time versus it all going wrong. It is also important to discuss the speed of drinking, pacing and the effect of food.

How much is too much? Getting the balance right - Key stage 3 (PSHE 11-14)

Structure: 1 or 2 lessons

Preparation: Scissors, photocopied sheets, blu tack

Optional: empty bottles/cans, pens and paper.

Objectives

- o For students to consider the effects of different levels of consumption/ the number of drinks on their bodies and their personal safety
- o To begin to associate the number of drinks and speed of drinking with different levels of risk taking and consequences.

Guidance notes:

Spilt the class into several working groups and give each group a **blank 'number of drinks' answer sheet** and a **'consequences'** sheet for them to cut out the statements/ pictures.

Ask the groups to place each statement/picture on the number of drinks sheet to reflect when they think the consequence might happen.

When the exercise is complete:

- o Work through each statement/picture and ask each group where they put it on the answer sheet.
- o Ask each group to explain why they have chosen that number of drinks.
- o Discuss contexts of higher risk/lower risk.

You may also choose to enlarge the statements/ pictures and laminated them, so that they can be stuck on the class wall next to the number of drinks. (Laminated versions are included in the games and activities pack). Alternatively, you could have a table with the number of drinks represented by cans/bottles and ask the students to place each statement/picture next to the number of drinks. You can also ask students to come up with their own ideas of possible consequences associated with each number of drinks.

Questions for discussion:

- o Would how quickly you consume the drinks make a difference?
- o Would alternating a soft drink with an alcoholic drink make a difference?
- o Would eating before or while drinking have an affect?

(N.B. This should be considered as a rehearsal strategy for when pupils encounter alcohol in social situations as they get older. Please reinforce to pupils that the 56% of 11-15 year-olds in England have not even consumed a whole alcoholic drink).

Extended answers to questions that may arise

How does alcohol make you drunk?

Alcohol is a mood altering substance. It affects the nerves that pass messages around the body by slowing them down, and the more you drink the greater the effect. The reason people often get more lively when they've had a drink is that alcohol affects parts of the brain responsible for self-control. As you drink, the alcohol passes into your bloodstream.

Ethanol is the intoxicating part of alcohol and its molecules are so small that they can actually pass into the gaps between brain cells. There it can interfere with the neurotransmitters that enable all the brain's activities. If you drink fast, alcohol will start to flood the brain.

Fortunately, alcohol can give some warning signs as it penetrates into the brain and central nervous system, so if you spot the signs in yourself or a friend, moderate your or their drinking or stop drinking further amounts. The last thing you would want is to lose control, vomit or end up in hospital. Severe cases of heavy drinking can result in alcoholic poisoning, coma or death.

Your reactions also slow down, and as you drink more, you may become uncoordinated or unsteady on your feet. Your speech may get slurred and you may start seeing double. If you've had a lot to drink you may also experience strong emotional responses - for instance you may become aggressive or tearful. And because your judgement is impaired, you may do things that you might not normally do - from dancing on tables to going home with strangers. They may seem a good idea at the time, but can be extremely dangerous.

The classic warning signs of drunkenness

- o You feel giddy
- o You start to lose the thread of what you're saying
- o You feel unsteady on your feet
- o You start seeing double

Tips to avoid feeling sick or passing out

The best advice, of course, is to avoid drinking or to drink within the guidelines to avoid this happening. If someone is planning to drink, they should

- o Eat before or while drinking - even a bowl of cereal or a couple of pieces of toast will help.
- o Avoid top ups as it is harder to keep track of how much alcohol is being consumed.
- o Pacing - having a soft drink between each alcoholic one really helps slow drinking down and gives the body a chance to break down the alcohol consumed.

What are the dangers of drinking to drunkenness?

Drinking to drunkenness increases the risk of ending up in the Accident and Emergency Department (22% of accidental deaths are alcohol related), getting involved in a fight, not getting home safely, and of being robbed or sexually assaulted.

What happens to teenagers who get drunk?

The Chief Medical Officers' guidance is that those under 15 shouldn't drink. This is not only because a teenager's organs are not fully developed (and hence are more vulnerable to the toxins from the breakdown of alcohol) and psychologically they are less able to deal with alcohol's brain altering mechanisms, but also teenagers are far more likely to be involved in an accident, a violent incident or get in trouble with the police after drinking, affecting their chances of a good career if they end up with a criminal record or losing their driving licence through letting things get out of hand.

If a teenager drinks regularly before they are 15 they are 7 times more likely to be in a car crash because of drinking, and 11 times more likely to suffer unintentional injuries after drinking.

Even drinking to get drunk occasionally can have serious consequences as it increases risky behaviour. Teenagers who get drunk are far more likely to:

- o injure themselves or someone else – even accidentally
- o engage in unsafe sex, which could result in sexually transmitted infections and unplanned pregnancies

- o be robbed – especially of cash, iPods and mobile phones
- o end up going home with a stranger on their own
- o get in a fight, an argument or have relationship problems
- o get into trouble with the police and end up with a criminal record.

Use [Getting the balance right](#) worksheet and if possible, distribute the [Alcohol and you](#) leaflet or the shorter [Top tips for staying safe if you plan to drink](#) A5 handout.

Hangover

The best advice is to avoid getting one by not drinking or by sticking to low risk guidelines.

Symptoms of a hangover include feeling thirsty, sick, tired and headachey and being more sensitive to noise or bright lights. These effects are caused by alcohol being dehydrating – alcohol makes your body lose water. Alcohol also irritates the lining of the stomach, leading to indigestion, and nausea if you drink a lot. Some people may be able to drink more than others without getting a hangover, but EVERYONE's body will react to being overloaded with alcohol. Your liver can only break down one unit an hour. Time is the only cure for a hangover giving the liver a chance to get rid of the toxins helped by drinking lots of water and eating wisely.

Why is alcohol dehydrating?

ADH, or anti-diuretic hormone acts on the kidneys to reabsorb water, so that less water leaves the body in urine. Alcohol reduces the production of ADH, so that the kidneys produce more urine and the body loses too much water. This means alcohol has a dehydrating effect and explains some of the symptoms of a hangover (e.g. feeling thirsty and headachey).

When not to drink

Responsible drinking means drinking enjoyably, sociably, and moderately and includes not drinking at all in situations when the effects of alcohol will put someone's safety at risk, such as:

- o When driving
- o When operating machinery, using electrical equipment or working at heights
- o When taking certain medications - ask your doctor if you are unsure
- o When pregnant as alcohol crosses the placenta to the foetus.