

Health Effects of Alcohol on Teens

EFFECTS ON THE BRAIN

The **brain does not completely develop until a person is around 21 years** old, which means any brain damage before this age could be **permanent**. (Scholastic Choices, May 2001)

Studies discovered that the hippocampus (the part of the brain that assists with **memory and learning**) is about **10% smaller and less effective** in teens that were heavy drinkers than in non-drinking teens. (Scholastic Choices, May 2001)

Alcohol dependent teens show significant impairment in verbal skills on standardized tests. (VA Medical Center, Univ. of California, 2001)

EFFECTS ON THE BODY

Each year, **five times as many teens die from alcohol overdose than from any other drug**, legal or illegal. Signs of alcohol overdose include unconsciousness, shallow breathing, vomiting, cardiac arrest or irregular heartbeat, or low body temperature.

Many **organs are affected more quickly in teens** than adults. Rapid damage can occur in the **liver, pancreas, brain, reproductive system, and stomach**.

Alcohol use puts teens at **significant risk for many types of cancer**, including oral, esophageal, laryngeal, breast, and stomach.

LIFESTYLE EFFECTS

Youth who drink before the age of 15 are four times **more likely to develop alcohol dependence** than those who begin drinking at age 21. (NIAAA, 1997)

Youth who use alcohol are **more likely to become sexually active at an earlier age**, to have sex more often, and to engage in unprotected sex, placing them at great risk for HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. (OIG, 1992)

Youth who drink alcohol are **7.5 times more likely to use any illicit drug** and **50 times more likely to use cocaine** than young people who never drink alcohol. (CASA, 1994)

Alcohol is associated with the **three leading causes of death** in teenagers – accidents, homicides and suicides. (National Center for Substance Abuse at Columbia University, 2003)