



10 THINGS FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS
WONDER ABOUT **ALCOHOL**
BUT AREN'T SURE WHO TO ASK

Do you remember when you were getting ready for college? What were you concerned about? What did you assume college would be like? And what surprised you?

Most incoming freshmen are excited about getting some freedom and making their own choices about how they spend their time and money. Some are planning to drink. Some have no plans to drink, but just aren't sure about how things will go.

Either way, they have lots of assumptions and ideas about alcohol.

And lots of questions. We've pulled together some questions that first years have about alcohol (but may be afraid to ask).



“Is everyone drinking? Will I have to deal with pressure to drink at every event or party I go to?”

Students often have the impression that “everyone is drinking”, when in fact, there is a large group of students on campus that don’t drink at all, or if they do drink, it’s not all that often.

There are also a lot of activities on campus that don’t involve alcohol. If you don’t want to drink, there are plenty of students who are like-minded and lots of things you can do on campus where you won’t be pressured to drink.





“Will I get made fun of if I choose not to drink at a party?”

Honestly, this could go either way, and a lot of it depends on who you hang out with. Some college freshmen report that their friends and peers are really supportive of their choice not to drink. Some even admire their decision and ability to follow through on their commitment. Others say that there is a lot of peer pressure to drink and are fearful of being a joke.

If you are planning not to drink, consider your friends and peers. Will they support you? If not, you should probably seek out friends who are like-minded about alcohol so that you can use “positive peer pressure” on each other.

There are lots of activities and groups on campus that you can be a part of. Many of them are not centered around drinking.

“How much alcohol can I drink without getting drunk? Will I be able to handle drinking? What if I get wasted the very first time?”

How much a person can drink depends on many factors, including general health, weight, menstrual cycle, if they are dehydrated, whether or not they have eaten, whether or not they are taking medication, and other factors, like a family history of alcoholism.

As a general guideline, Blood Alcohol Content, or BAC, is a measurement of alcohol in a person’s bloodstream. At about 0.05 BAC, a person starts acting “drunk” (slurring their words, slow reactions, blurry vision). By the time a person gets to 0.08 BAC, coordination, vision, ability to drive, judgment, the ability to track objects, and the ability to do two things at once are even more impaired. Driving at this point is very dangerous.

BAC is calculated based on several factors:

- a person’s birth sex (determines how quickly their body process the alcohol)
- a person’s weight
- how long they spend drinking (it takes about 1 hour to process a “standard drink”)
- how much alcohol they have drunk (quantity)
- what “proof” or percentage of alcohol the drink is (higher proof alcohol means that there is more alcohol per ounce)





For comparison, a “standard drink” contains roughly 14 grams of pure alcohol. That equals:

- 12 ounces of regular beer (which is typically about 5% alcohol)
- 5 ounces of wine (which is typically about 12% alcohol)
- 1.5 ounces, or roughly one shot glass, of distilled spirits (which is about 40% alcohol)

Not all drinks are considered equal. As the percentage or proof of alcohol goes up, the amount that equals a standard drink goes down.

NOTE: if a person has a higher tolerance for alcohol, their BAC can be higher without them feeling the same effects. This is actually dangerous, because a high BAC can result in alcohol poisoning.

Having a higher tolerance means that you likely experience fewer stimulating effects from alcohol and greater depressant effects when drinking. It is not because you can "hold your liquor" and are not being affected by alcohol. It is because you no longer feel the effect in the same way, due to higher levels of drinking over time.

People with high tolerance are at greater risk for alcohol problems, because they are less likely to feel the effects and may be trying to achieve the same "high" as before.

“Does it really help to... (hold a drink instead of drink, alternate water with alcohol, eat before or after I go out, etc...)?”

There are things you can do to stay sober while others are drinking or to keep your blood alcohol content at lower levels. Holding a cup but not drinking can be a way to “be a part of the group” without actually drinking. Choosing something to drink other than alcohol is another way.

Strategies like alternating a glass of water with a glass of alcohol help keep BAC at “safer” levels, though if someone is underage, it’s illegal for them to have any alcohol in their system at all. Other strategies include counting your drinks or holding to a “one drink” limit, arriving at the party late, or having friends keep you accountable to a plan when you go out.





"Can I get rid of a hangover by... (eating food, taking a cold shower, exercising, etc...)?"

One of the common misconceptions is that eating, taking a cold shower, exercising, or drinking a lot of water after drinking will help you sober up faster or avoid a hangover.

Unfortunately, these things don't really help. While these things may make a drunk person feel more awake, the only way for someone to sober up is for the alcohol to leave their system. On average, it takes the body around an hour to process one standard drink, and around two hours for that one standard drink to fully leave the body.

Alcohol processes through the BAC rises more rapidly when there is no food in the stomach to absorb the alcohol, so eating before you drink does help, as it allows alcohol to be absorbed more slowly into the bloodstream. By the time you're done drinking, however, the alcohol has already been absorbed into the body. Having food in your stomach won't help your liver metabolize alcohol any faster. In fact, eating a lot before bed after drinking can actually lead to acid reflux.

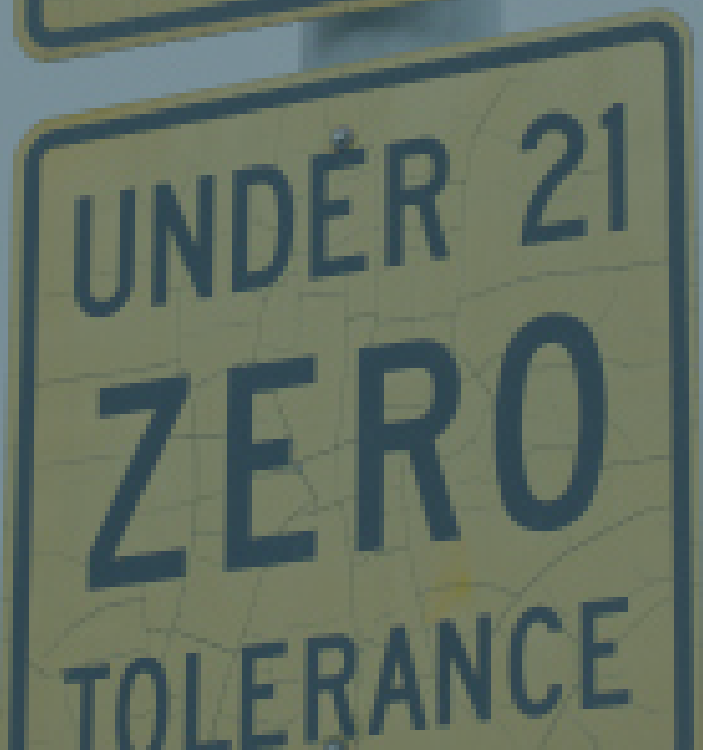
**“What if I have a roommate who drinks?
How do I deal with that if I’m not into
drinking?”**

Most campuses have a policy that allows roommates to switch out if they are having problems.

If you are concerned about your roommate’s behavior and feel that it will be disruptive to your studies or will keep you from doing well, talk to your dorm leader or manager.

The other thing you can do is try to work it out or set up some guidelines or “house rules.” Just because your roommate drinks doesn’t mean they are unreasonable. They might be fine with agreeing to drink only on the weekends, not bringing drunk friends home, or avoiding other things that would be disruptive to your studies or sleep schedule.





“What are the consequences for drinking? On campus? At a local bar or hangout?”

Consequences for drinking on campus will depend on the conduct code at your school.

Underage drinking is illegal in most states. Some have a zero tolerance policy (which means that you are breaking the law if you have any alcohol in your bloodstream) and some use a 0.02 BAC threshold.

If you are concerned about the consequences, you should check out your school’s website, talk to a counselor, and check out your state’s laws.

“Are frat parties as crazy as they sound? Are they dangerous? Is it safe to go to one?”

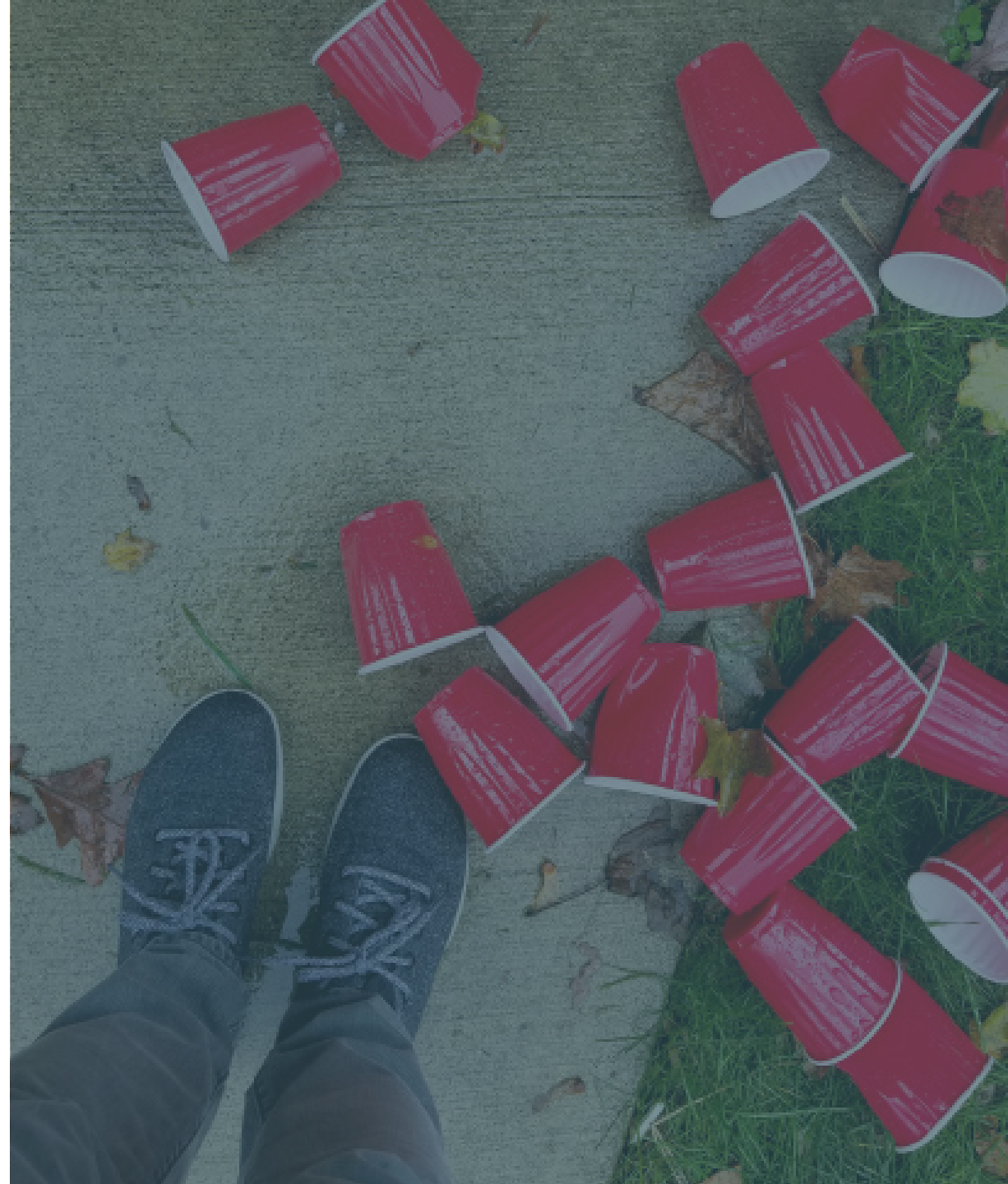
Drinking at a fraternity or sorority party comes with unique pressures and risks. You may find more peer pressure to drink and less support for a non-drinking decision. Binge drinking and “crazy” behavior may be more common, but it also depends on the house.

Another thing to be aware of is drink spiking. Drink spiking is when someone deliberately adds alcohol or another drug to your drink without you knowing. This could happen at a house party or in any other drinking situation.

Here are some tips for preventing drink spiking:

- Pour your own drinks so you know what's in them
- Keep a hand over the top of your drink to prevent anything from being put in
- Keep your drink with you or get a new one if you have to set it down for a while

Hazing and social hosting are two other situations that should be taken seriously. Fraternities, sororities, or other groups can be held liable for drinking (especially underage drinking) that happens at a party that is hosted by the group, even if the hosting location is off-campus.





For example, if someone leaves a hosted party drunk and gets into a car accident, the group hosting the party can be held responsible for the damages, because they provided the alcohol.

Alcohol is commonly involved in hazing and can quickly become dangerous. Hazing is prohibited by many colleges because it is often abusive.

Any time you go out, it's best to have a plan in place in case you get into trouble. That goes for a Greek house party or when you are hanging out with a group of people you don't know very well. Make sure someone knows where you are going. Check in with them to let them know you are OK. Have a plan in place for if you don't check in.

“If underage drinking is illegal, is it really happening on campus like it seems to be in the movies? Or is that just Hollywood?”

There are underage drinkers on campus, but there is a bit of Hollywood exaggeration going on, too. There are also students on campus who are choosing to wait until they are 21 before drinking.

There are a lot of good reasons to wait or abstain from drinking:

- It can be expensive
- It can affect your academic achievement; you are paying a lot to get an education and alcohol makes it harder to learn
- It can affect your sleep; you may think that alcohol makes it easier to sleep, but it actually disrupts the natural sleep pattern and the rest that you get isn't as good
- It can affect your athletic abilities and even your scholarship; alcohol makes it harder for your muscles to recover after a workout or practice
- If your family has a history of alcohol abuse or addiction, you may be predisposed to addiction as well, and many people don't think it's worth taking the risk
- Drinking just isn't that much fun; not liking the taste, the experience, or the hangover





“How do I know if my friend has been drinking too much? How will I know if I should get help?”

As a general rule, if you think someone might be in trouble, get help. Once alcohol enters the bloodstream, it will continue to process whether or not the person is conscious, awake, or aware. That means that a person can die from alcohol poisoning while they are “sleeping it off.”

Drinking alcohol quickly, or chugging drinks, is especially dangerous, because the alcohol will continue to process through a person’s system even after they have stopped drinking, continuing to raise their BAC.

If a person has already passed out from drinking too much alcohol and you are unable to wake them, get help.

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