

# ALCOHOL BASICS

## From the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)

### Brief Description

Ethyl alcohol, or ethanol, is an intoxicating ingredient found in beer, wine, and liquor. Alcohol is produced by the fermentation of yeast, sugars, and starches. It is a central nervous system depressant that is rapidly absorbed from the stomach and small intestine into the bloodstream. A standard drink equals 0.6 ounces of pure ethanol, or 12 ounces of beer; 8 ounces of malt liquor; 5 ounces of wine; or 1.5 ounces (a "shot") of 80-proof distilled spirits or liquor (e.g., gin, rum, vodka, or whiskey). NIDA does not conduct research on alcohol; for more information, please visit the [National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism \(NIAAA\)](#) and the [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#).

### Effects

Alcohol affects every organ in the drinker's body and can damage a developing fetus. Intoxication can impair brain function and motor skills; heavy use can increase risk of certain cancers, stroke, and liver disease. Alcoholism or alcohol dependence is a diagnosable disease characterized by a strong craving for alcohol, and/or continued use despite harm or personal injury. Alcohol abuse, which can lead to alcoholism, is a pattern of drinking that results in harm to one's health, interpersonal relationships, or ability to work.

### Statistics and Trends

In 2009, 51.9% of Americans age 12 and older had used alcohol at least once in the 30 days prior to being surveyed; 23.7% had binged (5+ drinks within 2 hours); and 6.8% drank heavily (5+ drinks on 5+ occasions). In the 12-17 age range, 14.7% had consumed at least one drink in the 30 days prior to being surveyed; 8.8% had binged; and 2.1% drank heavily. *Source: [National Survey on Drug Use and Health](#) (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration Web Site)*. The NIDA-funded 2010 Monitoring the Future Study showed that 13.8% of 8th graders, 28.9% of 10th graders, and 41.2% of 12th graders had consumed at least one drink in the 30 days prior to being surveyed, and 5.0% of 8th graders, 14.7% of 10th graders, and

26.8% of 12th graders had been drunk. Source: [Monitoring the Future](#) (University of Michigan Web Site).