The CDC reports that alcohol-related car accidents kill about 32 people a day. Families are torn apart, people’s lives are ruined by it and thousands are killed each year. Everyone claims to know the dangers of drinking and driving. So why does it still happen every single day? The truth is, no one believes it will happen to them . . . until it does.

It’s easy to avoid drinking and driving. Just don’t do it. Even if you’re just a little buzzed, don’t get behind the wheel. BUZZED DRIVING IS DRUNK DRIVING!

Alcohol and the Law

Alcohol isn’t just bad for your body and mind – it can also land you in jail. Having “one too many” can quickly translate to several days or years in prison. The most common alcohol-related offenses include:

• Underage drinking
• Public intoxication and disturbing the peace
• Providing alcohol to underage drinkers
• Drinking and driving

An alcohol-related crime can cause you to have trouble finding a job or even getting a driver’s license.

A Wrong Turn

Mel’s Story

Mel was always on the right track, popular and was friends with everyone. When Mel turned 16, her parents bought her a brand new car for her birthday. Mel was elated: she had a great time driving around town. But in the early morning hours of September 26, Mel and her three girlfriends were killed as they drove home from a Homecoming party.

Mel had struck a concrete median going 75 mph. They found a high level of alcohol in Mel’s bloodstream. Several of Mel’s friends saw her at the party, drinking beer with her friends. One of her friends suggested she call a cab, but Mel refused. She felt okay to drive.

Mel was a bright girl; she knew the dangers of drinking, but she ignored them. As a result, she and her friends’ lives were tragically cut short.

Why Drink?

Under Pressure

A lot of college students use alcohol as a way to celebrate their passage into adulthood or adapt to their new surroundings and they are totally comfortable with it. Movies like Animal House and The Hangover and pop songs like Katy Perry’s “Last Friday Night” all make binge drinking seem like a normal thing to do.

Some teens and young adults drink because they’re stressed out or depressed. But drinking doesn’t solve problems – it just creates more problems.

If you’re looking for a way to blow off some steam or relieve stress, try doing something that doesn’t involve drinking. There’s tons of safe, healthy stuff to do instead of getting wasted:

• Go to a movie with friends
• Hit the gym
• Play a video game
• Join a study group
• Listen to music or play an instrument
• Join a club or sports team
• Volunteer for a cause
Lights Out

After the Party

You wake up and immediately feel pain all over your body. You open your eyes and you’re no longer at the party – you’re in the hospital. Your mother is standing over you with teary eyes.

You apparently had too much to drink the night before and your body couldn’t take it anymore. So it went into shock. Fortunately, your friends were smart enough to call 9-1-1 in time. The doctors say if you hadn’t arrived when you did, you would be in the city morgue instead of a hospital bed. You are very lucky. Every year, thousands of people end up in the emergency room after they’ve had too much to drink and a large majority of them don’t wake up. Ever!

The Effects of Alcohol

What Drinking Does to Your Body

Everyone knows the immediate effects of alcohol: dizziness, impaired judgment, loss of motor skills. But alcohol has more serious immediate effects including:

• Short-term memory loss
• Major mood swings
• Violent behavior
• Lack of coordination

That’s not all. Because alcohol impairs your judgment, people who are drunk are much more likely to engage in risky behavior, like driving while they’re buzzed or having unprotected sex.

If you keep drinking, the risks get worse. People who abuse alcohol regularly can expect long-term effects like:

• Increased risk of cancer
• Brain damage and memory loss
• Problems getting (and keeping) a job
• Liver damage, including cirrhosis of the liver
• Relationship and family problems

Binge Drinking

From “One Drink” to “One Drink Too Many”

Your liver (which is the organ responsible for filtering toxins, like alcohol, out of your bloodstream) is only able to process about one alcoholic beverage per hour, and that’s true across the board. It doesn’t matter whether you’re a girl or boy or how tall, thin, or muscular you are. Drink more than one drink and that extra alcohol is just causing damage to your body.

This is why you hear so much about the dangers of binge drinking – drinking heavily in a short amount of time.

Binge drinking tends to happen with young adults and college students who drink at social gatherings. It’s not hard to lose track and drink too much when you’re at a party having a good time. Remember, one of the short-term effects of alcohol is impaired judgment. In other words, after one or two drinks, it’s not always easy to tell when you’ve had too much.

So how much is “too much”? The answer will probably shock you. For men, five drinks are considered binge drinking and for women four drinks. Any more than that can result in serious consequences for your body.

More Than A Hangover

Alcohol Poisoning Can Kill You

Drinking too much alcohol doesn’t just damage your liver and brain. It puts your life in jeopardy. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), nearly 88,000 people die from alcohol poisoning every year.

When you binge on alcohol, you’re basically poisoning yourself. Your body can’t handle this sudden intake of toxins and it reacts violently. Some symptoms of binge drinking include:

• Queasiness and vomiting
• Seizures
• Disorientation and confusion
• Blacking out
• Irregular breathing

Call 9-1-1 right away if a friend shows these symptoms after heavy drinking. And NEVER let them close their eyes, even if they tell you they’re just sleepy. They might never open them again.

A Slippery Slope

Sliding into Alcoholism

Alcohol is a drug and just like any other drug, it’s possible to become addicted. The problem is, alcoholism may not be obvious at first, especially if you drink regularly. Some signs of alcoholism include:

• You feel like you need alcohol to get you through the day
• You feel sick when you go without drinking
• You can’t have just one drink – you have to keep going
• It’s hard to get a buzz; you have to keep drinking to feel anything

If you think that you or someone you know may be struggling with alcoholism, contact a drug resource center as soon as possible. There are lots of resources and organizations for anyone struggling with alcohol issues:

• Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD): www.sadd.org
• Alcoholics Anonymous (AA): www.aa.org
• Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD): www.madd.org

Test Yourself!

Are you putting yourself at risk? Read the following statements and choose “True” or “False.”

1. I’ve only had a few drinks in the past hour; I’m still OK to drive. True or False
2. I tend to drink more than five drinks when I hang out with friends. True or False
3. Drinking helps me relax and have a good time in social situations. True or False
4. Sometimes, I drink so much I can’t remember what happened the night before. True or False
5. Some of my relatives have struggled with alcoholism in the past. True or False

If you answered “True” to at least two of these questions, you are putting yourself at a high risk for a lifetime of alcohol problems.