

Alcohol Consumption: Know the Risks of Impaired Driving

In the United States, drunk driving crashes in 2020 accounted for more than 11,000 lives. This is a sharp increase from the 2011 to 2020 ten-year average, which accounted for just over 10,000 lives. Each day, 29 people die from vehicle crashes involving an alcohol-impaired driver. Every life is essential: We should not lose anyone to drunk driving.¹

A small amount of alcohol, though under the legal limit, can be hazardous when combined with driving.^{1,2} Alcohol impacts decision-making, reaction time and coordination, all of which are needed to operate a vehicle safely.¹

The legal limit for blood alcohol concentration (BAC) is 0.08 g/dL. As your BAC rises, judgment, behavior, speech and balance are all affected, which make driving under the influence a danger to yourself and others.



U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Karina Lopezmata

The Effects of BAC on Driving Capability¹

BAC (g/dL)	Effects on Driving
0.02	Reduced visual function and ability to multitask
0.05	Poor coordination, tracking moving objects and response time
0.08	Limited concentration and memory, poor speed control and impaired perception
0.10	Reduced ability to stay in lane and brake appropriately
0.15	Significantly reduced vehicle control, attention and information processing

In addition to being dangerous, impaired driving is against the law in all 50 states. Drinking and driving can result in both misdemeanors and felonies. It can also lead to losing your driver's license, fines and jail time, which can impact your military career.^{1,2}

Not all people have equal risk when it comes to impaired driving. People aged 21 to 24 (27%) and 25 to 34 (25%) have the highest percentages of drunk drivers compared to those in older age groups. Additionally, men are four times more likely to be involved in drunk driving accidents than women.¹

The cost of impaired driving is high. Drunk driving crashes cost more than \$44 billion per year, and a first-time offense can cost you nearly \$10,000 in fines and legal fees. If you see or suspect an impaired driver on the road, contact law enforcement immediately with details of the

vehicle and the driver's behavior.¹ If you are considering drinking while celebrating this holiday season, it is best to have a plan to remain safe.

Tips for Drinking Responsibly^{1,3}

1. Plan how you will get home before you begin drinking.
 - Identify a non-drinking driver.
 - Schedule a ride service or take public transportation.
 - Plan to stay with friends or family or reserve a hotel.
2. Know your limit and make a plan not to exceed it.
 - Count and measure your drinks accurately according to standard measurements.
 - Do not drink more than one standard drink per hour.
 - Alternate alcoholic beverages with non-alcoholic drinks, preferably water.
 - Eat before and during drinking.
3. Do not get into a vehicle with a driver who has been drinking.
 - Take the impaired person's keys.
 - Offer to pay for a ride service or get someone to pick you up.



How Much Is a Standard Drink?⁴

- 12-ounces of beer (5% alcohol content)
- 8-ounces of malt liquor (7% alcohol content)
- 5-ounces of wine (12% alcohol content)
- 1.5-ounces of 80-proof liquor (40% alcohol content)



Drinking alcohol in moderation is considered no more than two drinks per day for men and no more than one drink per day for women. Binge drinking is considered five or more alcoholic drinks for men and four or more alcoholic drinks for women during a single occasion.⁴

References

1. Drunk Driving NHTSA
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2. Impaired Driving CDC
https://www.cdc.gov/transportationsafety/impaired_driving/
3. Celebrate Safely this Holiday Season – Drink Responsibly NMCPHC
https://www.med.navy.mil/Portals/62/Documents/NMFA/NMCPHC/root/Documents/health-promotion-wellness/general-tools-and-programs/hp-toolbox/HPW_December_Drunk_Driving_FS.pdf
4. Alcohol and Public Health CDC
<https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/index.htm>