

# Alcohol Overdose



## What Is An Alcohol Overdose?

Consuming alcohol is known to cause impairments in decision making, motor skills, and speech. The more a person drinks, the stronger these effects.

Alcohol overdose, also known as alcohol poisoning, happens when a person's blood alcohol concentration (BAC) is so high that the areas of the brain in charge of basic life functions begin to shut down. The main areas that shut down control body temperature, heart rate, and breathing.

Many factors determine what BAC is fatal for each individual. However, a BAC of .30 and above is commonly life threatening.

- Alcohol overdose happens when someone's blood alcohol concentration is so high, parts of the brain begin to shut down.
- Alcohol overdose is always an emergency. Call 911 immediately if you suspect an overdose.
- There are many factors that influence the risk of an alcohol overdose including age, gender, and other medications or substances.
- The best way to prevent alcohol overdose is to avoid or minimize alcohol consumption.

## What Are The Symptoms Of An Alcohol Overdose?

Alcohol overdose can be life-threatening. Being able to recognize the signs can help save a life. They include:

- Confusion
- Clammy skin
- Dulled responses (such as no gag reflex)
- Low body temperature
- Vomiting
- Slow heart rate
- Slow breathing (<8 breaths/minute)
- Irregular breathing (10+ seconds between breaths)
- Seizures
- Difficulty staying conscious or unable to wake up

## Alcohol Overdose Is An Emergency

If someone is suspected of having an overdose, **call 911 immediately**. After calling, it is best to gather any relevant information. This includes:

- What they were drinking and how much
- Any other substances and medications taken
- Existing health conditions and allergies

It is important to stay with the person, especially if they are struggling to stay conscious. Position them so they are sitting upright. Alcohol overdose stops the gag reflex which is meant to prevent choking. If they vomit, it is important to lean them forward, or if they are laying down, to position them on their side to prevent choking. If they are still awake, it is best to try to keep them awake as long as possible.

It is always best to exercise caution. If an alcohol overdose is suspected, it is important to get help. Even if someone is unsure if another person is intoxicated enough to be in danger, it is best to call anyway. The consequences of not getting help for someone who needs it are worse than calling for help when it isn't needed.



**CONNECTICUT  
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for Prevention, Wellness and Recovery

**800.232.4424 (phone)**  
**[www.ctclearinghouse.org](http://www.ctclearinghouse.org)**

**A Library and Resource Center on Alcohol, Tobacco, Other Drugs, Mental Health and Wellness**

## Risk Factors For Alcohol Overdose

Many factors can influence the effect of alcohol on a person and their risk for overdose. Many of them impact how the body absorbs and breaks down alcohol.

- Age
- Gender
- Speed of drinking
- Sensitivity (or tolerance) to alcohol
- Amount of food eaten
- Medications

Binge drinking is a risk factor for alcohol overdose. Binge drinking is classified as the act of consuming large amounts of alcohol in a short time frame, bringing a person's BAC to .08% or above.

Consuming other substances, especially opioids and benzodiazepines (ex. Xanax), also increases the risk of an overdose. Combining substances intensifies the effects of both, which can lead to an overdose even with a small amount.

## How Is Alcohol Overdose Treated?

Treatment for alcohol overdose usually occurs in an emergency care setting and consists of mostly supportive care. This means that medical professionals try to manage symptoms and minimize complications.

The main purpose of the treatment is to maintain life sustaining functions, like breathing and cardiovascular function. Some treatment methods include IV fluids and providing glucose if the person's blood sugar is low.

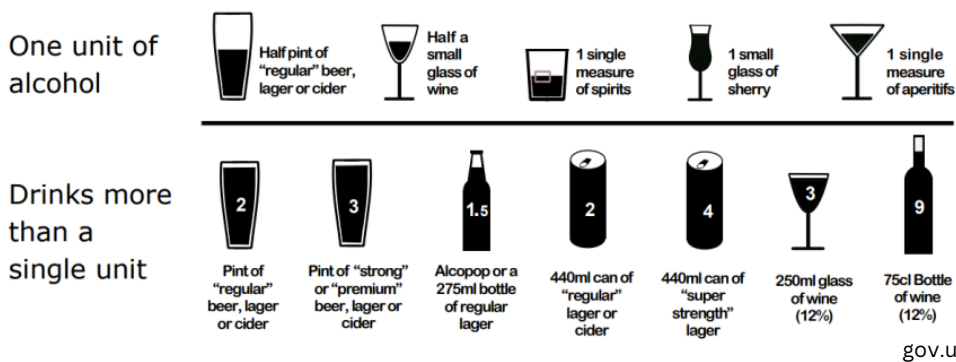
Once the individual is no longer intoxicated, staff may evaluate them for a substance use disorder and recommend next steps.

## Avoiding Alcohol Overdose

The only 100% effective way to avoid an alcohol overdose is to not consume alcohol. However, if a person still wishes to drink, it is important to be mindful about how much is being consumed.

Consuming large amounts of alcohol at once can increase the risk of alcohol overdose. It is important to remember that alcohol is not always served following a standard unit. A unit looks different depending on the type of alcohol consumed, and many consume more than a standard unit without realizing.

## Alcohol unit reference



## Connecticut Resources

**CT Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services**  
[www.ct.gov/DMHAS](http://www.ct.gov/DMHAS)

**CT Stronger**  
<https://ctstronger.org/alcohol-use-disorder/>

**Drug Free CT**  
<https://www.drugfreect.org/>

**24/7 Access Line**  
1.800.563.4086

**2-1-1 of Connecticut**  
[www.211ct.org](http://www.211ct.org) or call 2-1-1

## National Resources

**Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration**  
[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)

**National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)**  
[www.nida.nih.gov](http://www.nida.nih.gov)

**National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism**  
<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov>

