Alcohol: Lowering Risk

Alcohol can be a way to enhance social experiences, especially when consumed in a way that reduces the risk of negative health effects. Most Columbia students who choose to drink practice lower-risk drinking behaviors. Lower-risk drinking helps you maximize the fun and minimize the potential for harm that can occur due to alcohol intoxication (e.g., acute dehydration, legal troubles, etc.). Below are some ways you can reduce risk:

Lower-risk drinking is:

- Determining the number of drinks you plan to consume before you start to drink.
- Using counting strategies such as tallying drinks on your phone, or putting bottle caps in your pockets.
- Consuming no more than four drinks for women / five drinks for men in one sitting.
- Hydrating and eating before and while you are drinking.
- Drinking at a pace of no more than one standard drink per hour. A standard drink = 12 oz. for beer, 5 oz. for wine, and 1.5 oz. for liquor.
- Alternating alcohol-free drinks and drinks containing alcohol. If you want an alcohol look-alike, consider “dressing up” your water by ordering a seltzer with lime, or asking for a non-alcoholic beer or daiquiri.
- Avoiding drinking games; or, if you choose to play, setting a limit for how long you’ll take part or how much you’ll drink.
- Avoiding shots.
- Stopping drinking at a pre-determined time.
- Making an exit plan before going out. How will you get home?
- Asking friends for help sticking to your drinking “rules”.
- Knowing what is in your drink.
- Never leaving a drink unattended.

Recognizing risk:

Occasionally a person may consume more than planned. In some cases, this can result in alcohol poisoning. If you can recognize the signs, you can help keep yourself and your friends safe. Alcohol depresses the nervous system. At high levels of consumption this can impact a person’s ability to breathe and the gag reflex, which prevents choking. Even after someone stops drinking, alcohol is in the system and can be fatal. If you see someone experiencing the following symptoms, call for help immediately:

- Semi-consciousness or unconsciousness and cannot be awakened
- Cold, clammy, pale, or bluish skin
- Slowed breathing (fewer than eight breaths per minute)
- Irregular breathing (10 seconds or more between breaths)
- Vomiting while "sleeping" or passed out, and not waking up after vomiting

If a person has any of these symptoms, don’t just let them “sleep it off,” get emergency help immediately and do not leave the person alone. While waiting for help to arrive, turn the person on her/his side to prevent choking in case of vomiting.

Last reviewed/updated: July 30, 2015

Columbia Health BASICS program (Morningside) [2]

BASICS is designed to assist students in examining their drinking and other drug-use behavior in a judgment-free environment. Services provided through the BASICS program are non-judgmental, non-labeling, and private.
This service is available to all registered undergraduate, graduate, and professional students on the Morningside campus, including Affiliated Schools: Teachers College, Union Theological Seminary and Jewish Theological Seminary.

Website
Columbia Health BASICS program (Morningside) [3]
Read more [2]

Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) (Morningside) [4]

CPS supports the psychological and emotional well-being of the Morningside campus community by providing counseling, consultations, and crisis interventions – all of which adhere to strict standards of confidentiality. Drop-In Counseling Offices offer the opportunity for students to meet with CPS counselors, without an appointment, when immediate support, resources or referrals are needed.

Phone
(212) 854-7426

Website
Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) (Morningside) [5]
Read more [4]
The Mental Health Service offers services from social workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists to provide confidential services including short-term psychodynamic psychotherapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, pharmacotherapy, and couples counseling.

**Phone**

(212) 305-3400

**Website**

Mental Health Service (CUMC) [7]

Read more [6]

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Go Ask Alice! is not an emergency or instant response service.

If you are in an urgent situation, please visit our Emergency page to view a list of 24 hour support services and hotlines.

**Source URL:** http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/fact-sheet/alcohol-lowering-risk

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