
The effects of alcohol consumption in college students

Throughout history humans have engaged in practices that alter their psychological state. There are many reasons why people wish to change their mental and emotional status. It is not hard to imagine the rationale for the very first alcohol-induced experience it arose from curiosity. Perhaps one of our ancestors ate some fermenting fruit and felt a pleasant sensation that piqued his curiosity. Curiosity is still a prevalent reason for alcohol consumption today. We are bombarded with messages promoting alcohol use, and we are curious to find out just what it feels like to consume alcohol.

Another reason for alcohol consumption is stress reduction. We live in trying times, and alcohol is seen as a way to alleviate our stress. Self-medication for other problems carries over to alcohol ingestion. Alcohol can ease physical and emotional pain. If the person who consumes alcohol is also using medications for pain relief, the effects of alcohol can be intensified.

Alcohol is often served at social gatherings and is a normal part of the setting at places such as taverns where people go to congregate with others. Many believe that alcohol instills a sense of social confidence and promotes relaxation in the company of others. This occurs because of alcohol's disinhibiting effects. There is no doubt that loneliness can serve as an incentive for alcohol use and abuse.

Isolation can be another reason to use alcohol. People who have poor support networks, decreased mobility, and limited access to transportation may turn to alcohol. This type of situation is particularly prevalent among senior citizens.

People enjoy the psychoactive effects of alcohol for various reasons. It provides a sense of relief and disassociation from reality. A sense of adventure or perhaps a spiritual search is often given as the causative reason for alcohol consumption.

Perhaps the most problematic reason for alcohol use is peer pressure. Many adolescents and college students find themselves in situations where alcohol is present. Because younger people often lack self-confidence or the refusal skills to handle the pressures of such situations, they often begin to experiment with alcohol.

Peer pressure, or the direct or indirect encouragement from one's own age group to engage in activities that they may or may not want to engage in, is a major factor in the development of risk-taking behaviors (e.g., alcohol use, drug use, and tobacco use). Peers act as an influential model by introducing, providing, or pressuring risky activities (i.e., alcohol use) to other peers.

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By modeling these behaviors to their peers, college students are viewing alcohol use as a positive and socially acceptable experience. However, what colleges students fail to take into consideration are the negative consequences that are related to alcohol use, especially within a peer group context. For example, the leading cause of death for adolescents 17 to 20 years old is alcohol-related motor vehicle crashes. In addition, about 400,000 college students between the ages of 18 and 24 have unprotected sex due to drinking. More than one fourth of those students report being too intoxicated to know if they even consented to have sex. Therefore, it is imperative to understand peer pressure, as well as which groups of college students are more susceptible to it, in order to decrease these negative consequences from occurring.

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