

Your roommate came home from a party after having a lot to drink and is now passed out—WAY out—in your room. What should you do?

Be Concerned

If your roommate has passed out and is very hard to arouse, there is reason to be concerned. Alcohol is a central nervous system depressant. Consumed rapidly and in large doses, alcohol can shut down respiratory and brain functioning, and, if it is consumed rapidly enough, it will suppress the nausea response so the body cannot eliminate the toxin. With severe alcohol poisoning, a person can pass out and never wake up.

How Much Alcohol Does it Take?

Different people experience different effects, and there is no way to predict where the exact “point of no return” lies. The lethal effects of alcohol can start as low as blood alcohol levels of .30% (approximately 9 shots in 3-4 hours for a 120 lb. woman, 15 shots in 3-4 hours for a 160 lb. man), and .45% is commonly fatal in nonalcoholics. And accidents can happen with any positive blood alcohol level.

Lighter weight individuals can have dramatically higher blood alcohol levels than heavier individuals, and are at higher risk for alcohol poisoning.

How Does Alcohol Poisoning Happen?

It is possible to develop alcohol poisoning through consumption of hard liquor, or large amounts of beer or wine.

Both novice and experienced drinkers may suffer severe, life-threatening intoxication when large amounts of alcohol are consumed in a short period of time, such as “doing shots”, drinking games, chugging, hazing incidents, and a lighter weight person trying to match a heavier weight person drink for drink (e.g., a small, 120 lb. woman and a large 180 lb. man drinking together).

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Signs of Severe Alcohol Poisoning

- **Inability to arouse the person with loud shouting or vigorous shaking, or inability of the aroused person to stay awake for more than 2-3 minutes**
- **Slow or irregular breathing—fewer than 8 breaths per minute or lapses in breathing that last longer than 10 seconds**
- **Weak pulse, or very rapid or very slow pulse**
- **Cold, clammy, pale or bluish skin**
- **Vomiting while passed out, and not awakening after vomiting**
- **Since blood alcohol level can continue to rise after the person has stopped drinking, s/he should be reassessed every hour for at least 2-3 hours by sober persons (i.e., individuals who have not been drinking)**

Passed Out?
OR
Alcohol
Poisoning?

What To Do If You Suspect Severe Alcohol Poisoning

- Call 911 immediately. If you live in a residence hall, contact Residential Life Staff.
- Stay with the person until help arrives. Do not leave the person alone, even for a minute.
- Turn the person on his/her side, with head slightly lower than the rest of the body, to prevent choking if the person vomits.
- Be prepared to give emergency medical personnel as much information as possible, including any drugs or medications taken.

call 911

What **NOT** To Do If You Suspect Severe Alcohol Poisoning

- Do not hesitate to call 911. The person's life is in danger—better safe than sorry.
- Do not leave the person alone. The person may seem to be okay, but the alcohol s/he ingested may take some time to be absorbed before peak levels reach the brain.
- Do not leave the person lying on his/her back. If the person vomits in this position, choking and aspiration could occur. Keep the person lying on his/her side by placing a pillow behind the back.
- Do not try to give the person anything to eat or drink—this could cause aspiration or choking.
- Do not put the person in a cold shower. S/He could fall, or the shock could make the person pass out.

This pamphlet provides general information on the effects of alcohol consumption. It is not meant as a guide for your individual physical characteristics, which may vary due to a number of factors. If you have questions about the effects of alcohol on your own body, you should contact your health care provider, or the resources listed in this brochure.

Preventing Alcohol Poisoning

Alcohol poisoning is preventable. Here are steps you can take to keep it from happening to you.

- Do not drink alcohol when you are under the influence of other drugs or are taking medication.
- Do not participate in drinking games, chugging, beer bongs, funnels or other rapid consumption activities.
- Do not drink on an empty stomach.
- Pace your drinking by drinking slowly or alternating alcoholic drinks with nonalcoholic drinks.
- If you choose to drink, do so in moderation.

Resources

If you suspect alcohol poisoning, call the **Washington Poison Center at 206-526-2121**, **Harborview Medical Center's CareLine at 206-731-2500**, or call **911**.

For more information about alcohol poisoning, or referrals for alcohol abuse assessments and treatment, contact these UW resources:

Health and Wellness
206-543-6085

Addictive Behaviors Research Center
206-685-1200

Counseling Center
206-543-1240

Hall Health Primary Care Center
206-685-1011

don't leave