

# Sex and alcohol really don't mix

Let's be clear here — It is illegal to drink in Oregon before your 21st birthday. It is also unwise. Alcohol negatively affects the brain, and your brain is still developing until your early - to - mid 20s.

But let's be realistic too. We know that young people drink, and we've all heard stories of college parties centered around alcohol. Binge drinking may be an accepted part of the college scene, but the results can be damaging. Did you know that binge drinking is a factor in almost one-third of all college failure?

Binge drinking is drinking more than three drinks in one day or more than seven drinks in a week for a woman, and more than four drinks in one day or more than 14 drinks in one week for a man. One drink is defined as:

- o One 12-ounce beer;
- o One shot of 80-proof liquor; or
- o One 4-5 ounce glass of wine.

Binge drinking is a main cause of 29 percent of college academic failures and 21 percent of dropouts. These numbers do not take into account student deaths, injuries, assaults, sex crimes, diseases, unplanned pregnancies and legal troubles that may be caused by excessive drinking. It is safe to say that binge drinking causes many serious problems that affect a lot of people.

Drinking mixed with sex can have particular consequences for women. Women who are fertile, drink alcohol and have unprotected intercourse increase their risk of having a baby with fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS), a permanent condition that affects every aspect of a child's life and the lives of family members.

Evidence has shown that prenatal exposure to alcohol causes damage to the developing fetus. Such exposure is commonly cited as the leading preventable cause of birth defects and developmental disabilities. While the number and severity of negative effects on a child born with fetal alcohol syndrome can range from subtle to serious, the consequences are lifelong. By the time a woman finds out she is pregnant and sees a family physician, she might have already consumed alcohol during the pregnancy and affected the development of her fetus.

If you are sexually active and you drink, it is very important to correctly and consistently use an effective method of birth control to reduce the risk of an alcohol-exposed pregnancy.

Recently, University of Oregon and Western Oregon University women aged 18 to 20, who also had a history of binge drinking, shared their experiences and decisions regarding their use of alcohol and birth control. One young woman shared, "It was my first sexual experience. I barely remember it. I think I gave consent but I wouldn't have if I'd been sober. I will never drink that much again."

Through student health centers, college students have access to information about the importance of avoiding the potentially dangerous mixture of alcohol and sexual activity. Know the risks of both drinking and sexual activity before you engage in either one.

**For more information about binge drinking, alcohol-exposed pregnancies and contraception, go to [www.DontOpenThis.org](http://www.DontOpenThis.org). There is no safe time or amount to drink when you are pregnant. If you ever have sex without effective birth control, it is very important not to drink alcohol until you know for sure that you are not pregnant.**

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