

## ***Coping with College Series***

### **Reducing Alcohol's Risks**

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Why do some Illinois State students drink alcohol and experience negative consequences while others don't? Chances are, students without negative consequences are using harm reduction strategies. Harm reduction strategies attempt to reduce the negative consequences that can accompany alcohol use. What does this mean for you? More enjoyment as you avoid the pitfalls of fines, DUI's, fights, and lost study time due to day after recoveries. It also means less social regrets, day after apologies, or having to avoid people for things said or done while under the influence. Want to drink but reduce the risks? Try these strategies.

Set predetermined limits of how much you are going to drink before you go out. Remember, regardless of your size, the liver can only process about one drink per hour. This means 12 oz of beer, 5 oz of wine, 1.5 oz of distilled spirits (vodka, whiskey, rum, etc.), or a 12 oz wine cooler.

Combine limits with spacing your drinks. Alternate alcohol beverages with, preferably, a non-carbonated, alcohol-free beverage. Why? Carbonated beverages open a valve between the stomach and the small intestines (the Pylor valve) sending alcohol into the small intestines. Although most people believe alcohol absorption occurs mainly in the stomach, it actually occurs primarily in the small intestines. This quick absorption results in quick intoxication. Avoid carbonated beverages as a mixer for the same reason.

Stay away from caffeine and other stimulant containing drinks also. Adding caffeine and other stimulants short circuits the body's defense system, allowing you to stay awake and consume more. This can lead to dangerously high blood alcohol levels (BAL). Also, caffeine, like alcohol, works to dehydrate the body. And dehydration leads to nausea, severe dry mouth and exhaustion.

Remember that the key factors that determine intoxication are body size/weight, the amount of alcohol consumed, and the rate you consume it. That is why "all you can drink" situations and drinking games should be avoided as they encourage drinking large quantities over a short amount of time. Eating before consuming alcohol is another good strategy. Food slows alcohol's trip through the digestive system, delaying it's entry into your bloodstream. Delaying the flow of alcohol into the blood stream reduces peak intoxication rates.

Other factors such as your mood, expectations, and certain medications also influence your susceptibility to alcohol difficulties. When you are angry or depressed, alcohol should be avoided. These moods tend to only worsen when alcohol is added to the picture.

If you find yourself drinking just to get drunk, have a hard time stopping once you start, or use alcohol to cope with anxiety, depression or as an escape from unpleasant feelings or thoughts, it may be time to explore the role of alcohol in your life. If you feel that alcohol might be a problem for you, or someone you know, please call 438-3655 to set up a confidential appointment with one of our counselors. You can also complete an [online alcohol screening](#) or access any one of our "[To help yourself](#)" sections by going to the Student Counseling Services website at <http://www.counseling.ilstu.edu/>.