

Poison Facts:

Alcohol Poisoning

What makes alcohol a poison?

Alcohol depresses the nerves that control involuntary actions such as breathing and the gag reflex, which prevents choking. Excessive use of alcohol over a short period of time can stop these functions. A person's blood alcohol concentration can continue to rise while he or she is passed out. Even after a person stops drinking, alcohol in the stomach and intestines continues to enter the bloodstream and circulate throughout the body. It is dangerous to assume a person will be fine after "sleeping it off."

What are the signs of alcohol poisoning?

- Mental confusion
- Coma or not being able to wake up
- Vomiting
- Seizures
- Slow breathing (fewer than eight breaths per minute) or irregular breathing (10 seconds or more elapsing between breaths)
- Hypothermia (low body temperature), bluish skin color and paleness

What can happen to someone with alcohol poisoning?

There are many possible effects of alcohol poisoning. These include:

- Choking on vomit
- Breathing that slows, becomes irregular or stops
- A heartbeat that becomes irregular or stops
- Hypothermia (low body temperature)
- Hypoglycemia (too little blood sugar), which can lead to seizures
- Untreated severe dehydration from vomiting, which can cause seizures, permanent brain damage or death
- Irreversible brain damage
- Death

What should I do if I suspect alcohol poisoning?

If you suspect someone has alcohol poisoning, call The University of Kansas Hospital Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222.

Common myths about sobering up include drinking black coffee, taking a cold bath or shower, “sleeping it off” or “walking it off.” These methods do not work, however, and prevent you from seeking help when you may need it the most. Know the danger signals of alcohol poisoning, and don’t be afraid to ask for help. Source: National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.

For more poison prevention and first aid information, call the

Poison Control Center

Serving the Residents of Kansas

Toll-free Hotline

1-800-222-1222

THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS HOSPITAL

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