Celebrate Safely this Holiday Season – Drink Responsibly

End of the year holidays are a cause for celebration. Office parties and family gatherings can, however, create environments and opportunities that increase the risk for Sailors and Marines to engage in unhealthy behaviors that impair driving, especially drinking and driving. Operating a motor vehicle under the influence of alcohol can have real life consequences, particularly during the holidays when there are more drivers on the road, many of them heading to or from celebrations. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), 31 percent of car crash fatalities involve a drunk driver.¹ That number rises to 40 percent during major holidays, such as Christmas and New Year’s Eve.² Even at levels below the legal limit, alcohol can seriously impair judgment and coordination as well as slow reaction time. Celebrate safely this holiday season by being a sober driver and following the tips below.

Celebrate Responsibly

Although the holidays are a time to celebrate, you should do so responsibly. Take the time to put a party plan in place before the festivities begin, so that you can enjoy time with friends and family for years to come.

- Determine your transportation home before you even leave your house. Ideas include:¹
  - Identify a non-drinking driver you will ride with before you start drinking
  - Schedule a taxi or take public transportation
  - Stay with family or friends or reserve a hotel room
  - If you drove, give your keys to a dependable friend at the beginning of the night

- Know your alcohol limit and make a plan not to exceed it before drinking. For example:²
  - Count and measure your drinks accurately using standard measurements. Learn more in the “Don’t Get Wrecked” infographic
  - Pace yourself, sip slowly, and ensure you drink no more than one standard drink per hour
  - Alternate alcoholic drinks with non-alcoholic drinks
  - Eat before and during the evening to slow your body’s absorption of alcohol

- Never get into a car with an impaired driver or allow your friends to drive drunk

Determine if You Have a Drinking Problem

Between the various workplace potlucks to multiple family get-togethers, it can be difficult to determine if you are a social drinker who occasionally has one too many drinks, or if you are...
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someone with a drinking problem. If you agree with one or more of the statements below, you may be abusing alcohol.

- Have feelings of shame, guilt, or remorse about your drinking after the event
- Lie about your alcohol use and/or hide your drinking habits
- Have fellow service members, friends, or family who are concerned about your drinking
- Need alcohol to relax after a stressful day or have fun during a night out
- Forget what you did, where you were, or who you were with while you were drinking
- Frequently drink more than you planned or intended
- Continually neglect your duties and responsibilities at work or home because of drinking

Get Help

If you or someone you know needs help:

- Talk to your Drug and Alcohol Program Advisor (DAPA) or Navy Drug and Alcohol Counselor
- Speak to your Commanding Officer, XO, OIC, CMDCM/COB, or Chaplain
- Reach out to DoD Medical Personnel
- Contact your Fleet and Family Support Center Counselor

Additional Resources

For more information on drinking responsibly visit:

- Drink Responsibly. Keep What You’ve Earned
  - Navy Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention (NADAP) campaign
- Preventing Drug Abuse and Excessive Alcohol Use
  - Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center Health Promotion and Wellness (NMCPHC HPW) campaign

References

Do You Drink Too Much?

How do you know if you’re drinking too much? You may be drinking too often, too much at one time, or both. To determine whether you’re drinking too much alcohol, you first need to determine if you are engaging in a risky or low risk drinking pattern.

Risky vs. Low Risk Drinking

Understanding your drinking pattern is the first step to deciding whether it needs to be adjusted. Low risk drinking limits have been identified by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) as no more than four drinks per day and no more than 14 drinks per week for men.¹ For women, NIAAA defines low risk drinking as no more than 3 drinks per day and no more than 7 drinks per week.¹ These are guidelines for men and women to keep their alcohol consumption at a level that put them at low risk for negative health effects. This does not mean there is no risk involved even when following these guidelines.

On the contrary, those who exceed these limits are considered “risky” or “heavy” drinkers. According to NIAAA, about one in four drinkers who engage in risky drinking already have an alcohol use disorder.¹ It’s important to remember that it is both how much you drink and how often that could result in increased risk. In general, the more drinks you consume on a single day and the more often you drink more than the daily and weekly drinking limits as indicated, the greater risk to develop not only alcohol use disorders, but other health and personal problems.¹

Signs of Risky Drinking

There are signs that you or your friend may have a drinking problem and are at risk of an alcohol use disorder. If heavy drinking continues over a long period of time, the severity and quantity of potential harmful consequences increases. The signs below may help you identify risky behavior, earlier rather than later.¹

- Drinking more or longer than you planned
- Failed attempts to cut down or stop drinking
- Putting yourself in harmful situations while under the influence of alcohol
- Having to drink more alcohol to get the “effect” a lesser amount used to give
- Having a memory blackout
- Feeling depressed or anxious after drinking
- Fighting with family and friends while under the influence or because of drinking
Five Tips for Responsible Drinking

The below tips provide some ways in which you can practice safe drinking behaviors.¹

- **Alternate alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages.** Pace your drinking by alternating every alcoholic drink with a glass of water.
- **Include food.** Always accompany alcohol with a meal.
- **Count your drinks.** Make a plan for how many drinks you want to drink and stick to it. Make sure to track how much you’re drinking and the quantity of alcohol in your drinks.
- **Plan activities that don’t include alcohol.** If you notice your weekends are focused around drinking, plan other activities to participate in that don’t involve alcohol.
- **Have goals.** Set a goal for how much money you want to spend on alcohol in a weekend, a goal for engaging in other activities that may be halted due to excessive alcohol use, and a goal for how many drinks you will have. Setting goals for your weekend will often keep you on track to have a productive and fun weekend!

Where to Find Help

If you think you or a friend may be struggling with alcohol use, there are several Navy resources available for help. You can visit the Substance Abuse Rehabilitation Program (SARP) located at your local military treatment facility. For information on programs or responsible drinking tools, contact your Alcohol and Drug Control Officer (ADCO) or your command Drug and Alcohol Program Advisor (DAPA). For confidential communication, you can speak with your chaplain or may talk with DoD medical staff. Fleet and Family Support counselors are also available to provide counseling to you and your family members.

References

Excessive Use of Alcohol

Many people enjoy a drink or two, especially when socializing with friends and family, but drinking too much or too often can lead to terrible consequences. Alcohol remains the third leading preventable cause of death in the United States, killing more than 80,000 people each year. Alcohol use can lead to injuries, health problems, birth defects, and other consequences when used in excess. Excessive alcohol use includes one or more of the following:

- Heavy drinking, typically defined as more than four drinks (see below for what counts as a drink) per day and 14 drinks per week for men and more than three drinks per day and 7 drinks per week for women
- Binge drinking, typically defined as five or more drinks on a single occasion for men, and four or more drinks on a single occasion for women
- Underage drinking
- Drinking while pregnant

How to avoid heavy or binge drinking

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), about 25 percent of adults had at least one heavy drinking day in the past year. Binge drinking and heavy drinking can be avoided by understanding how much alcohol your drink contains, how much is considered “healthy” for you, and also by listening to your own body when consuming alcohol. The graphic below shows a variety of alcoholic beverages and how much of each is considered “1 Drink.”

[Graphic showing various alcoholic beverages and their alcohol content]
When choosing a drink, consider the following limits provided by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.⁴

- Low risk drinking limits for women: no more than 3 drinks on any single day and no more than 7 drinks per week
- Low risk drinking limits for men: no more than 4 drinks on any single day and no more than 14 drinks per week

These are recommended limits, however, it is extremely important to consider other factors such as your weight, height, how much food you have consumed, medications you are taking, and health status.

**What is the Harm?**

Frequent heavy drinking has been linked to several risks to one’s personal life, physical and mental health, injury, and death.⁵ Alcohol has been a factor in about 50 percent of severe trauma injuries and sexual assaults, and 40 percent of fatal motor vehicle crashes, suicides, and fatal falls.⁵ Health risks associated with heavy alcohol consumption include: heart disease, liver disease, sleep disorders, depression, stroke, bleeding from the stomach, various types of cancer, and more. It is important to remember that consuming any amount of alcohol can alter your judgment and function. Alcohol enters your bloodstream immediately and the effects can appear as soon as 10 minutes after your first sip.⁶ As your blood alcohol concentration (BAC) level increases with the more alcohol you consume, one can experience reduced inhibitions, slurred speech and confusion, difficulty breathing, and memory loss. See below for tips on how to practice safe and responsible drinking every time.⁶

**Tips for safe and low risk drinking**

The majority of Navy Reservists (88 percent) reported binge drinking on only one or two occasions per year compared to 81 percent active duty Sailors.⁷ A larger proportion of Navy Reservists were more likely to report staying in the daily alcoholic drink limits compared to active duty Sailors (93 percent and 86 percent, respectively).⁷ Keep up the good work by following the three easy steps below to responsible drinking:

1. Plan ahead for a safe ride home
2. Don’t try to keep up with others
3. Know your limit, before you get there.
References


