

INFORMATION YOU CAN TRUST FROM THE FALMOUTH PREVENTION PARTNERSHIP



BINGE DRINKING A BIG PROBLEM AMONG HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS

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This article is based on information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Binge drinking, a very dangerous behavior, is not widely recognized as a women's health problem. Drinking too much – including binge drinking - results in about 23,000 deaths in women and girls each year.

Binge drinking for girls is defined as consuming four or more alcohol drinks (beer, wine, or liquor) on an occasion. Girls' bodies respond to alcohol differently than boy's. It takes less alcohol for girls to get intoxicated because of their size and how they process alcohol.

About 1 in 8 women aged 18 years and older and 1 in 5 high school girls binge drink. Women who binge drink do so frequently – about 3 times a month – and have about 6 drinks per binge. Sixty-two percent of high school senior girls who drink reported binge drinking. ***More than 90% of adolescent alcohol consumption is binge drinks.***

Binge Drinking Risks

Binge drinking is dangerous! It increases the chances of breast cancer, heart disease, sexually transmitted diseases, unintended pregnancy, and many other health problems and risky behaviors, such as unintentional injuries, violence, and alcohol dependence.

Women who binge drink while pregnant risk exposing their developing baby to high levels of alcohol, increasing the chances the baby will be harmed by the mother's alcohol use.

Alcohol Poisoning

Alcohol poisoning is the most life-threatening result of binge drinking. If your teen drinks too much and gets alcohol poisoning, it affects her body's involuntary reflexes — including breathing and the gag reflex. If her gag reflex is not working properly, she can choke to death on her vomit.

Other signs of alcohol poisoning include extreme confusion, inability to be awakened, vomiting, seizures, and slow or irregular breathing.

Binge Drinking May Harm Learning and Memory

After a night of partying and binge drinking, it is not uncommon for an adolescent to wake up with a hangover and not much memory of the past evening's events. Binge drinking may impair memory in young people long after the hangover has worn off, perhaps because of damage to the hippocampus, a region in the brain involved in learning.

Parents Can Help Prevent Binge Drinking

As a parent there is a lot you can do to help prevent your teen from engaging in binge drinking:

Be a good role model. Pay attention to your own alcohol consumption - if your teen sees you coming home and having three or four drinks to "unwind," or sees you on the weekend intoxicated after a dinner out with your friends they will get the clear message that binge drinking is a normal behavior and a way to have fun or relieve stress.

Talk to your teen about the consequences. Share your concerns about the health risks of binge drinking and make sure your teen knows what to do if a friend appears to have alcohol poisoning.

Do not supply your teen with alcohol. Parents often play a role in providing the alcohol that results in underage and binge drinking, and so it's crucial to keep an eye on the liquor in your home and to be vigilant if you suspect that your teen is using it.

Have a conversation about alcohol advertising. Alcohol manufacturers have developed a set of products to market directly to women. Walk through any liquor store in Falmouth and you will see shelves of flavored vodkas and lower-calorie cocktails. These new products target young women and teenage girls.

When you see an ad or a scene on TV or in the movies that glamorizes teens drinking, talk about the things they never show such as car crashes, an ER visit due to alcohol poisoning, and how heavy drinking literally makes you stupider.

There is a silver lining to the CDC findings. If 1 in 5 teen girls is binge drinking, it means that 4 out of 5 are not. We can talk to our kids, and we can still wield quite a bit of influence over their behavior.

Recommended Resource

CDC *Vital Signs* outlines the issue of binge drinking in teenage girls and provides access to in depth information about teen drinking. (www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/bingedrinkingfemale/index.html)

For more information, visit the partnership's website at: www.falmouthprevention.org.

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