

Newnham Alcohol Policy

Alcohol use and abuse

Alcohol is a drug, albeit a legal one. For many students it plays a significant part in their social lives. Like most things in life, alcohol can be safe and enjoyable when consumed in moderation but problems can arise in terms of health, mental well-being and personal safety if it is abused.

Alcohol abuse is a growing social problem nationwide, one which is of particular concern among younger age groups.

Think about the effects that drinking has on your body and your mental state. Some students choose not to drink alcohol at all; others drink safely without any problems or impact on their studies – but not all.

This policy is designed to advise you of the potential dangers of the abuse of alcohol, to establish some guidelines for its proper use, and to encourage a culture of self-regulation, respect and care for others and for yourself.

Health and Safety issues

Official guidelines <http://www.nhs.uk/Change4Life/Pages/alcohol-lower-risk-guidelines-units.aspx> recommend that, in order to reduce the health risks associated with drinking alcohol, both men and women:

- do not regularly drink more than 14 units a week;
- spread drinking alcohol over three days or more, if consuming this much;
- have a few alcohol-free days each week.

How much is a unit? As a general rule 1 unit is half a pint of beer, lager or cider, one small glass (125ml) of wine, or a 25 ml measure of spirit. Researchers define "binge drinking" as having at least 6 units in one session for women and 8 units in one session for men. Binge drinking all 14 units at once is bad for your health and potentially very dangerous.

Some useful information on the amount of alcohol in commercial drinks can be found on the Drinkaware web site <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk>. You might be surprised to find that a small (125ml) glass of red Jacob's Creek wine (as a popular example) contains 1.6 units of alcohol.

It takes your body about an hour to process one unit of alcohol, so you need to pace your drinking so that your body can cope. Also, the rate of absorption can vary and it is better to take alcohol with food. Also be aware of the effects of certain medication and high stress levels, which may increase the rate of absorption. Hence, you need to know how much you can safely drink and remain in control of yourself and the social situation.

As ethanol can cross the blood-brain barrier, the effects on the brain are rapidly seen. Effects can start within ten minutes and depending on an individual's metabolism can last for many hours. Slurred speech, vomiting, loss of balance, distorted vision are just some of the more immediate effects of drinking on the body, if you consume too much at once; so is unconsciousness.

Very high amounts consumed rapidly can lead to unconsciousness and vomiting – which can be very dangerous in terms of aspiration and choking. Alcohol poisoning can be fatal.

Excessive consumption can lead to anti-social conduct, aggression, intimidation or violence. Long-term use is linked to liver damage, heart disease, brain damage, some cancers and several disorders

of the reproductive system and sexual organs. Remember that it is possible to remain under the influence of alcohol the morning after a heavy drinking bout. It may take up to 48 hours without alcohol to allow your system to recover.

You should not drink alcohol if:

- you might be pregnant;
- you will be operating machinery or equipment in a practical class;
- you will be riding a bicycle. "Drink cycling" is an offence, even if the police cannot force you to provide a urine, breath or blood sample. You can be arrested and charged if you are incapable of having proper control of the bicycle;
- you may be driving a car. CUSU has a policy that no-one should drive on official CUSU business within 48 hours of drinking.

National statistics indicate that the prevalence of hazardous drinking in the 16-24 age group is over 50% for men and 30% for women – the highest prevalence for any age group. In common with many university towns, the local NHS Trust has expressed concern about the high numbers of alcohol related admissions to Addenbrooke's hospital.

Alcohol is an addictive drug and there is strong evidence that abuse of alcohol and alcohol dependency may stem from drinking in order to relieve stress, anxiety, and depressive thoughts – all of which are not uncommon among a student population, and for all of which help is available. Alcohol is a depressant and can exacerbate pre-existing depressive conditions as well as precipitate them. If your drinking habits are affecting your life and studying and you need help with the issues underlying your drinking, or if you know somebody in this situation, the following organisations can advise and help:

University Counselling Service: web site <http://www.counselling.cam.ac.uk> (01223 332865) The

Cambridge Drug And Alcohol Team: web site <http://www.cambsdaat.org> (01223 723020)

Drinksense : 185 East Rd Cambridge CB1 1BG; web site <http://drinksense.org/en/> (01223 350599)

Drinkline: for confidential help please call 0800 7 314 314 (open 24 hours) Drinkaware: website <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/>

Alcoholics Anonymous: web site <http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/>

Personal safety

An estimated 23,000 alcohol-related incidents take place in Britain each week. Being on the streets under the influence of drink puts you at greater risk of physical or sexual assault. So for safety, stay with friends, look out for your friends, don't walk back to College alone at night, and take extra care on night-time roads. You should also be alert to the risk of drink spiking in clubs.

Antisocial behaviour is often associated with excessive drinking. Although alcohol is a depressant it can exaggerate whatever mood you are in when you start drinking. When drunk, you may unwittingly seem more threatening to others, influencing how they react to you. Avoiding violence when not fully in control of yourself can be difficult; your perceptions will be dulled, it will take you longer to react and think things through, and your judgement may be reduced. Aim to talk your way out of a situation, avoiding aggressive language, and using open, non-threatening body language.

But always bear in mind that when you have been drinking, you will be more vulnerable to difficulties and danger than when sober.

College

For many students, alcohol plays a major part in their social life. However, for others, whose cultures do not endorse the consumption of alcohol, this emphasis on alcohol at all events can be insensitive. Organisers of student events should always ensure that there are plenty of good quality, alcohol-free drinks available.

The College wants to encourage students who choose to use alcohol to do so responsibly and not to abuse it. It is both foolish and dangerous to encourage others to drink more than they ought or wish by forcing them to participate in competitive drinking. Societies that have initiations which involve drinking and encouraging others to drink to excess are strongly discouraged; drunken behaviour resulting from such initiations will be considered to be in breach of discipline (see next section).

Those responsible for organising College functions – such as the JCR, the MCR, the College clubs and societies - should ensure that excessive quantities of alcohol are not available to guests and that only sensible drinking takes place. The JCR should not encourage bar promotions involving neat spirits or alcopops. The National Union of Students runs an alcohol awareness campaign which provides useful advice, see <http://alcoholimpact.nus.org.uk/about>

Any College event, including dinner in Hall, should be enjoyable and civilised for all present and this requires individuals to take responsibility for their own behaviour. Diners should exercise restraint and not drink to excess; hosts should look after their guests, friends look after one another and everyone should show consideration towards the Staff. If a diner is behaving inappropriately, they may be asked to leave Hall by a member of Staff.

The College Bar staff and student workers have a responsibility to ensure that College members and their guests do not drink to excess; those who do will be refused further service and may be asked to leave the Bar. It is illegal for Bar staff and student workers to serve someone who is clearly inebriated.

Disciplinary matters

A person whose behaviour is so affected by drinking as to make others feel threatened may be considered to be in breach of disciplinary rules. Drunkenness is not a defence; it cannot be regarded as a mitigating circumstance in any matter concerning a breach of discipline. Anyone who causes damage to property not their own, or who harms another person, or who disturbs the peace, or who requires the involvement of the emergency services because of alcohol consumption, will be considered to be in breach of discipline.

Anyone who encourages another to consume alcohol to the point of drunkenness or beyond will be considered to be in breach of discipline. The offence will be considered aggravated if there is an element of intimidation or bullying, that is, the person being encouraged to consume alcohol has indicated his or her reluctance to do so.

Like many things in life, alcohol can be safe and enjoyable when consumed in moderation. Take care of your own consumption and be responsible in relation to that of others.

College Council, 19 May 2017. *With acknowledgements to Clare College, Magdalene College, St Catharine's College, Cambridge and the University of Leeds.*