



Risky Drinking Can Put a Chill on Your Summer Fun

Summer is a wonderful time for outdoor activities with family and friends. For many people, a day at the beach, on the boat, or at a backyard barbecue will include drinking alcoholic beverages. But excessive drinking and summer activities don't mix. Drinking impairs both physical and mental abilities, and it also decreases inhibitions—which can lead to tragic consequences on the water, on the road, and in the great outdoors. In fact, research shows that up to 70 percent of all water recreation deaths of teens and adults involve the use of alcohol.¹

Swimmers can get in over their heads.

Alcohol impairs judgment and increases risk-taking, a dangerous combination for swimmers. Even experienced swimmers may venture out farther than they should and not be able to make it back to shore, or they may not notice how chilled they're getting and develop hypothermia. Surfers could become over-confident and try to ride a wave beyond their abilities. Even around a pool, too much alcohol can have deadly consequences. Inebriated divers may collide with the diving board, or dive where the water is too shallow.



Boaters can lose their bearings.

According to research funded by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, alcohol may be involved in 60 percent of boating fatalities, including falling overboard. And a boat operator with

¹ T R Driscoll, J A Harrison, M Steenkamp. (2004). Review of the role of alcohol in drowning associated with recreational aquatic activity. Inj Prev. 10:107-113.



a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) over 0.1 percent (approximately 4 to 5 drinks) is *16 times* more likely to be killed in a boating accident than an operator with zero BAC.² According to the U.S. Coast Guard and the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators, alcohol can impair a boater's judgment, balance, vision, and reaction time. It can also increase fatigue and susceptibility to the effects of cold-water immersion. And if problems arise, intoxicated boaters are ill equipped to find solutions. For passengers, intoxication can lead to slips on deck, falls overboard, or accidents at the dock.

Drivers can go off course.

The summer holidays are some of the most dangerous times of the year to be on the road. When on vacation, drivers may be traveling an unfamiliar route or hauling a boat or camper, with the distraction of pets and children in the car. Adding alcohol to the mix puts the lives of the driver and everyone in the car, as well as other people on the road, at risk.

Stay hydrated and stay healthy.

Whether you're on the road or in the great outdoors, heat plus alcohol can equal trouble. Hot summer days cause fluid loss through perspiration, while alcohol causes fluid loss through increased urination. Together, they can quickly lead to dehydration or heat stroke.

But this doesn't have to happen. At parties, make at least every other drink a nonalcoholic one. If you're the host, be sure to provide plenty of cold, refreshing nonalcoholic drinks to keep your guests well hydrated.

Summer will end, but consequences can endure.

You can have fun in the sun and still be safe. Avoiding beverages that cause mental and physical impairment while piloting a boat, driving a car, exploring the wilderness, and swimming or surfing is a good place to start. Be smart this summer—think before you drink, and make sure that you and your loved ones will be around to enjoy many summers to come.

For more information on preventing problems with alcohol this summer, and tips on cutting back, visit: <http://www.rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov>.



So what's in that drink, exactly?

Summer cocktails may be stronger, more caloric, and more expensive than you realize. You may be watching what you eat so you can fit into those summer clothes, but watching what you drink can keep you safe. NIAAA's alcohol calculators can help you assess calories, drink size, alcohol spending, blood alcohol levels, and the number of standard drinks in each cocktail. Visit <http://www.rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/ToolsResources/CalculatorsMain.asp>.

² G Smith, P Keyl, J Hadley, et al. (2001). *Drinking and recreational boating fatalities: A population-based case-control study*. *JAMA*. 286:2974–80.

