

Binge Drinking

Dangerous fun with serious consequences

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"I don't have a drinking problem. I just party on Friday nights. It's the only night I get wasted. It's just to relax. After all, I work like a fool all week long. I did OK on both of my exams this week, and I'm entitled."

Well, if you get wasted on Fridays or perhaps Fridays and an occasional Saturday, according to E.M. Jellnick, you are an "epsilon alcoholic," a fancy name for a binge drinker.

Jellnick describes five stages of alcoholics, ironically, by using Greek letters. Put two or three of his stages together and it sounds like a college fraternity. If you go to a frat party you'll probably run into a few of the alcoholic types he describes. For our purposes we are concerned with the epsilon drinker, also known as the binge drinker or weekend warrior. While this type of drinker is the least common type of alcoholic in the general population, binge drinkers are most frequently found on college campuses. Many college presidents agree that binge drinking is the most serious problem on campuses today.

Let's take a closer look by defining binge drinking. Binge drinking begins with drinking four or more drinks in a row. It differs from social drinking in two ways. First, binge drinkers drink with one purpose in mind—they want to get drunk. Second, binge drinkers believe that heavy drinking in social situations is not only OK, but it is also appropriate behavior. This pattern of drinking can range from mild to severe. The mild binge drinker sees special occasions as an excuse to binge, such as a birthday, holiday, anniversary, or in celebration of an accomplishment. The primary characteristic of the more severe type is loss of control. The severe binger does not know when he or she will binge or how long the binge will last. He or she has no control over how much alcohol will be consumed or what will be the results of the intoxication. Loss of control in regard to alcohol consumption is the hallmark symptom of a serious alcohol problem.

Who is at risk of becoming a binge drinker?

- College and university students are in the "high risk" population, especially those living in fraternity houses.
- Women on campus who have interpersonal stress, or are diagnosed with depression or anxiety.
- Athletes in general, but especially those taking steroids.

Who binge drinks?

According to a survey conducted by Harvard's School of Public Health:

- 44% of all college students report drinking five or more drinks in a row during a two-week period prior to the survey.
- 50% of all male college students report drinking five or more drinks in a row during a two-week period prior to the survey.
- 39% of all college women report drinking more than four drinks in a row during a two-week period prior to the survey.
- The percentage did not vary from freshman to senior.

This problem is most common in adults from 18 to 24 years of age. One suspected reason is that during this period young adults have a newfound freedom. Also, they have never been taught an appropriate way to drink socially. The only message society tells those under 21 is to not drink, and when one comes of age there is no guidance in the appropriate use of alcohol; therefore, it's not surprising that there is misuse and abuse of alcohol within this younger population of our society.

The good news is most binge drinkers refrain from this type of drinking once they leave college life and acquire responsibilities, jobs and maturity. This is evident by the fact that binge drinking is less common in the general population than on college



campuses. The bad news is some continue with this form of drinking and eventually become alcohol dependent (alcoholic) with all the symptoms and life problems associated with the disease. Unfortunately, some die before they outgrow the behavior. Last year alone, forty-one students died in alcohol-related deaths on university campuses.

Consequences of Binge Drinking

- Bingers miss class regularly.
- They fall behind in schoolwork.
- They engage in unplanned sexual activity.
- They do not use protection while having sex.
- Bingers get in trouble with campus police.
- They damage property on campus.
- They have been hurt physically or injured due to alcohol use.
- Bingers often drive a car while being intoxicated.
- Bingeing on alcohol often leads to use of other drugs.
- Alcohol is implicated in 90% of all campus rapes.

It should be noted that binge drinkers not only cause problems for themselves, but also cause problems for those around them. Non-drinking students report getting into arguments, being humiliated and insulted by binge drinkers. They report having to baby sit a drunken student and having their sleep and/or studying interrupted. Non-drinking students often must endure unwanted sexual advances. Non-drinking students also report being assaulted and having property

damaged by their binge-drinking counter-parts. Binge drinkers are also more likely than any other type of alcoholic to assault another person physically or sexually.

Recently, the Harvard School of Public Health reported a polarization on campuses between non-drinking and drinking students, with the number of non-drinking students increasing by approximately four percent during the past three years. The reported reasons are two-fold. First, non-drinkers may be responding to alcohol education efforts, or second, they may just be repulsed by the increasingly disruptive drinking behavior exhibited by the bingeing drinkers and want no part of it.

So now you know how a binge drinker behaves, and you know some of the consequences bingers cause for themselves and the people around them. You may be willing to admit that you have some of the characteristics or know someone who does. Now what do you do? The most obvious solution is abstinence: just don't drink. However, if this is too dramatic a solution, there is an alternative—RESPONSIBLE DRINKING.

Responsible Drinking

The Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission suggests the following recommendations for responsible drinking:

- Pace your drinking. Limit yourself to no more than one drink per hour.
- Plan ahead to avoid heavy drinking situations where you will be tempted to drink too much. If you find yourself in that situation, pace yourself (one drink per hour).
- Don't drink alcohol when you are hungry or thirsty. Eat before drinking and do not use alcohol to quench your thirst. Drink a non-alcoholic drink to quench your thirst, and then drink alcohol responsibly.
- Develop leisure and recreation activities other than drinking.
- Establish friendships with others who act responsibly about alcohol and drug use.
- Find ways to cope with problems without drinking. Speak to a counselor at Florida Tech's CAPS for assistance and/or treatment. Call us at 674-8050.

Remember, the hallmark symptom of someone with a binge-drinking problem is "lack of control," both in regards to the amount of alcohol they consume and the length of time they drink. Those dependent on alcohol will not be able to control their drinking; they will not be able to drink one alcoholic beverage per hour. These responsible drinking guidelines will not work for them. By definition, they cannot control the amount of alcohol they drink. The dependent alcoholic needs treatment, and the treatment will not include a one-drink minimum per hour. However, the responsible drinking guidelines can work for everyone else and they should be used.

Remember that responsible drinking includes respect for your peers and your campus, and respect for the power of alcohol and its incredible ability to impair judgment. Above all, remember to respect yourself.

Are you an alcoholic?

Answer these questions as honestly as you can.

1. Do you lose time from work or school due to drinking? Yes No
2. Is drinking making your home or residence life unhappy? Yes No
3. Do you drink because you are shy with other people? Yes No
4. Is drinking affecting your reputation? Yes No
5. Have you ever felt remorse after drinking? Yes No
6. Have you gotten into financial difficulties as a result of drinking? Yes No
7. Do you turn to less savory companions and an inferior environment when drinking? Yes No
8. Does your drinking make you careless of your family's/friend's welfare? Yes No
9. Has your ambition decreased since drinking? Yes No
10. Do you crave a drink at a definite time daily? Yes No
11. Do you want a drink the next morning? Yes No
12. Does drinking cause difficulty in sleeping? Yes No
13. Has your efficiency decreased since drinking? Yes No
14. Is drinking jeopardizing your job or academics? Yes No

15. Do you drink to escape from worries or trouble? Yes No
16. Do you drink alone? Yes No
17. Have you ever had a complete loss of memory as a result of drinking? Yes No
18. Has your physician ever treated you for drinking? Yes No
19. Do you drink to build up your self-confidence? Yes No
20. Have you ever been to a hospital or institution because of your drinking? Yes No

If you answered YES to any one of the questions, this is a definite warning that you may be an alcoholic. If you answered YES to any two, the chances are that you are an alcoholic. If you have answered YES to three or more, you are definitely an alcoholic.

(The above test questions are adapted from Johns Hopkins University Hospital, Baltimore, MD, in deciding whether or not a client is alcoholic.)

The Disease of Chemical Dependency
It is not a moral weakness
It is not a bad habit
It is not a mental illness
It is not a sign of weak character

Did you know?

- 28% of all college dropouts are alcohol users
- College students with alcohol problems are 11 times more likely to fall behind in school
- More than 60% of college women who have contracted sexually transmitted diseases, herpes or AIDS were intoxicated at the time
- Between 1986 and 1996, Driving While Intoxicated (DWI) arrests were highest for 21 year-olds
- Alcohol is involved in 75% of violent behavior on campuses
- Alcohol is implicated in 90% of all campus rapes
- Alcohol is involved in 25% of cases of academic attrition
- A typical student will spend more money on alcohol than on textbooks
- As many students will eventually die of alcohol-related causes as will eventually get their master's or doctoral degrees.

Self-reported Grade Point Average (GPA), Mean Reported Weekly Alcohol Consumption, and Mean MAST Score (the number of drinks consumed):

GPA	Mean Drinks Consumed Weekly
1.50–1.9	26
2.00–2.49	20
2.50–2.99	15
3.00–3.49	4
3.50–above	2

If you or someone you know is having a problem with alcohol or drugs, speak to a counselor at Florida Tech's Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) for assistance and/or treatment. Call us at 674-8050.

Counseling and Psychological Services

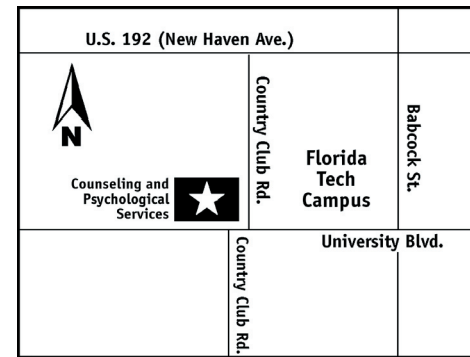
CAPS is a counseling facility available to Florida Tech students and their dependents. Its goal is to promote the best possible academic, vocational and emotional health.

Center Hours

Monday–Thursday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
 Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Location

CAPS is located at the intersection of Country Club Road and University Blvd., west of Babcock Street.



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