

College Students and Alcohol Use

Say the word “College” and generally what comes to mind are books, exams, learning. But for many, the image of beer guzzling young people may be the first thing that pops into their head. This is actually a fairly accurate image. According to the 2007 ACHA National College Health Assessment for colleges across the nation, 81.4% of college students have used alcohol in their lives, and 67% of them have used alcohol in the past 30 days. Alcohol use at Cal Poly Pomona is less common with 70% of students having used alcohol in their lives, and 53% using during the past 30 days (ACHA-NCHA, Spring 2007, Cal Poly Pomona). Still, the Cal Poly Pomona data shows that the majority of students here use alcohol. While some believe that drinking is a benign behavior that will go away, in fact, alcohol use in college can have serious effects that can last a lifetime.

Many studies have shown that alcohol use by college students can be detrimental to their academic success. College drinkers tend to make poorer decisions, which can cost them their grades and even their enrollment. A study conducted in 2002 (Wechsler, et. al.) showed that 25% of college students had academic problems due to alcohol. The 2007 NCHA administered at Cal Poly Pomona showed that 6% of students here reported negative impact on their academics due to alcohol use.

In recent years there has been much research that indicates heavy drinking early in life sets one up for a whole host of health problems in the future. Alcohol use in the

college years and the early 20s contributes to alcoholism (Hingson, et. al., 2007; Ryan, et. al., 2006). This is especially true for those who engage in regular binge drinking, which college students tend to do. Fortunately, other studies have shown that going to college can be protective against alcoholism. Those with higher levels of



education are less likely to use/abuse alcohol than those who don't have a college education (Jackson, et. al., 2005).

Other recent research shows that heavy drinking early in life contribute to the development of metabolic syndrome, which can be a precursor to cardiovascular

disease, diabetes, and stroke (Russell, et. al., 2008). This news may be surprising, given that many health practitioners recommend moderate alcohol use to prevent heart problems, but moderate drinking and the heavy drinking that college students engage in can have wildly divergent effects on the body. Russell's research shows that heavy drinking creates oxidative stress in the body that can damage cells over time, whereas moderate drinking (1 drink per day for women and 2 for men) on a regular basis over time has an antioxidant effect (especially if the drink is red wine).

Lastly, one of the most troubling effects that alcohol has on college students' health is the 1700 deaths that happen annually due to alcohol use (Hingson, et. al., 2005). These fatalities include motor vehicle

crashes where alcohol is involved, falls and other accidents, and alcohol poisoning.

There are a number of resources available to help college students who have a problem with alcohol use and/or abuse. On campus, Student Health Services and Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) have resources for students. Alcoholics Anonymous has meetings in many locations near campus and beyond. The following website has a wealth of information about many aspects of college drinking: <http://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/>.

During the month of April, Student Health Services will launch its “Green Bean Campaign”, a program designed to raise awareness about problem drinking. The campaign uses the idea of students using too many cans of green beans as an analogy to excessive use of alcohol. The Green Bean Campaign will be a precursor to the B.E. S.M.A.R.T. (Better Educated Students Managing Alcohol Responsibilities Together) program to be hosted by the Cal Poly Pomona AOD Advisory Council. This program includes a video contest, awareness board contest, and other activities to raise awareness regarding alcohol use on campus. The festivities will take place on May 1st outside the BSC.

IF YOUR FRIEND WENT OUT AND ATE A SIX PACK OF GREEN BEANS EVERY NIGHT WOULD YOU TALK TO HIM OR HER ABOUT IT?



Student Health Services

