

Dealing with an Alcohol-Related Medical Emergency



Imagine

Imagine that you are coming home and find someone who is very intoxicated and/or incapacitated (or passed out) from alcohol...



SEE IF THE PERSON IS AWAKE, OR CAN BE WOKEN UP...

- ✓ If they are awake, verify that the person knows who and where they are.
- ✓ See if they need help. Remember that if the person is vomiting, having difficulties staying conscious, and/or not making any sense when they speak they are suffering from alcohol poisoning and seek immediate help.
- ✓ If they are awake and able to communicate clearly, find out what they were drinking or if they took any other drugs.

IF THE PERSON IS UNCONSCIOUS AND WILL NOT WAKE UP...

- ✓ Call 911 or get other help immediately.
- ✓ Make sure the person is breathing and that breaths are not shallow or irregular.
- ✓ Check that his/her skin does not feel cold, clammy or looks unusual in color.
- ✓ Place the person on his/her side to prevent choking.
- ✓ Do not move someone who may have fallen (i.e., in stairwell, off a bed) in case they are injured.
- ✓ Stay with the person until help arrives, try to keep them still, do not offer food or drink, or attempt to have them "walk it off".
- ✓ Do not laugh at, argue with, or provoke.

Why Be Concerned?



THERE ARE SEVERAL CONCERNS...

- ✓ **Asphyxiation:** The person might choke on their own vomit if they cannot wake up.
- ✓ **Respiratory and/or cardiac distress:** Since alcohol is a depressant, too much can cause life functions like lungs and the heart to stop functioning. The person could appear to be asleep but really be suffering from a lack of oxygen.
- ✓ **Injuries and Physical Risk:** If the person is passed out in a public location, or outside there is risks of: sexual assault, physical assault, muggings and exposure to cold, rain, etc. There is also concern for people who fall, cross the street, or drown.
- ✓ **In the United States 1700 college students die annually** from alcohol, while this number includes Drinking and driving, a large percentage is from overdose and accidental injuries.
- ✓ **Over 500,000 college students are injured every year**, unintentionally from accidents related to alcohol.

Why Not Help?



SOME PEOPLE BECOME CONCERNED ABOUT HELPING...

Fear: I don't want to get the person in trouble.

Reality: Even though some people do have some legal or conduct consequences, being healthy and alive is preferable. Most students who have received help are grateful the next day for the assistance.

Fear: What if the person doesn't want help, or is violent or aggressive?

Reality: It's true not everyone is cooperative or even safe to be around. It is always best to approach someone (especially a stranger) with at least one other person. Protect yourself first. If the person needs assistance but is not acting safely, call 911 from a distance and track the person until help arrives.

Fear: Could I get in trouble for helping?

Reality: Some people are concerned that maybe they had a drink and are underage so the police may arrest them as well. The reality is they should still help. In most cases not legal/conduct action has been taken against the person who makes the call. It is, of course, always best to have a sober person present since even small amounts of alcohol can cloud judgment.

Remember...

- ✓ Call 911 (you can also get help from hall staff).
- ✓ Have a sober person stay with the person until help arrives.
- ✓ If the person is vomiting, attempt to keep a clear airway by placing them on their side.
- ✓ Vomiting is a sign of alcohol poisoning.

Resources



Office of Health Education and Promotion
Health Services
(603) 862-3823

<http://www.unh.edu/health-services/ohep/alcohol.html>