

Women and binge drinking: Expert weighs in

January 17 2013, by Maria Zanke



One in eight women in the U.S. participates in binge drinking, according to a recent report from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The rate among high school-age women is even higher—one in five—according to the report.

"One of the issues that's really struck us is that [binge drinking](#) is an unrecognized or under-recognized women's health issue," said CDC director Dr. Thomas Frieden during a telebriefing. "Binge drinking is the most common and most dangerous pattern of excess [alcohol consumption](#)."

Taylor Anderson is the associate director of Drexel's Behavioral Healthcare Education division and has worked for more than 30 years with individuals struggling with substance abuse. *DrexelNow* caught up

with Anderson to talk about the results of the CDC report and how the effects of binge drinking are unique to women.

How do you identify binge drinking?

Binge drinking is generally characterized by having five or more [alcoholic beverages](#). Keep in mind a serving of [alcohol](#) can be 1.5 ounces of liquor, a 12-ounce beer or 3 to 4 ounces of wine.

What are the effects of binge drinking? How does drinking affect women in particular?

There's a biological difference in men's and women's guts that makes men and women metabolize alcohol differently. Men have the capacity to metabolize alcohol faster than women, and that's before taking the average difference of body mass and weight into account. So [women](#) tend to feel the effects of alcohol quicker than men—on average, after two drinks.

Alcohol affects the brain. Once you feel the [effects of alcohol](#), one more drink might seem like a good idea, when it hadn't when you started drinking. It lowers your inhibitions, which puts you at greater risk for [engaging in] dangerous situations. [Excessive drinking](#) can also cause blackouts, and if lying on your back you can vomit and asphyxiate, and it can even cause death.

The study shows that in rate of binge drinkers is even higher among high school girls. What role does age have in influencing drinking abuse habits among this demographic?

It's not that young people aren't as intelligent as adults—it's that they're less experienced. In the very short life of a young person, six months is a very long time. We still live in a culture where [...] girls are under pressure to act a certain way. Drinking can make something seem terribly funny when it normally wouldn't seem that funny, and it can make things seem terribly sad when they normally wouldn't seem that sad. They're not thinking about the long term, they're thinking about how to fit in now. And for a lot of people, drinking can make them feel prettier, funnier, more confident than they normally do—these are things that are appealing to young people, girls in particular.

What tips do you have for someone who thinks she might be a binge drinker or is at risk to become one?

Have a designated driver. The benefits of having a designated driver are not only for the drive home—it's someone who can point out and help stop [dangerous situations](#) as they're happening.

If you think there is something you are trying to cover up with the effects of drinking—emotional issues, depression, social anxiety—then you should talk to a professional about how to resolve those issues without alcohol.

Provided by Drexel University

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