

# ALCOHOL

31 AUGUST

INTERNATIONAL  
OVERDOSE  
AWARENESS DAY

## WHAT IS ALCOHOL?

**Alcohol is a legal depressant that slows down the messages travelling between the brain and the body. In small amounts, alcohol can cause you to feel relaxed, more confident and heighten your emotions.**

Alcohol depresses the nerves that control involuntary actions such as breathing and the gag reflex (to prevent choking). A fatal dose of alcohol will eventually cause these functions to shut down. Since alcohol is an irritant to the stomach, excessive vomiting is also common. If the person is unconscious, this could lead to death by asphyxiation.

## SIGNS OF OVERDOSE

- Confusion
- Loss of co-ordination
- Vomiting
- Seizures
- Irregular breathing (a gap of more than 10 seconds between breaths)
- Slow breathing (less than eight breaths per minute)
- Pale or blue tinged skin
- Low body temperature (hypothermia)
- Unconsciousness or passing out

## OVERDOSE RESPONSE

**Call an ambulance**, tell the operator your location, and stay on the line.

**Keep them warm.**

**If you can't get a response** or the person is unconscious, put them in the recovery position. Don't leave them on their back.

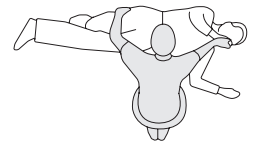
**If they are awake**, try to keep them in a sitting position and awake.

**Be prepared to give CPR** if they stop breathing before an ambulance arrives.

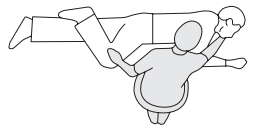
**If muscle spasms or seizures occur**, remove anything from the immediate environment that might cause injury.

## The Recovery Position

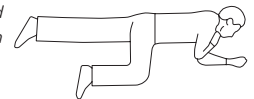
**Support face** Place the arm nearest to you at right angles to the body. Place their other hand against their cheek.



**Lift leg** Get hold of the far leg just above the knee and pull it up, keeping the foot flat on the ground.



**Roll over** Keep their hand pressed against their cheek and pull on the upper leg to roll them towards you and onto their side.



## WHAT NOT TO DO IN THE EVENT OF A SUSPECTED OVERDOSE

- **Do NOT leave them to sleep it off:** the amount of alcohol in someone's blood continues to rise even when they stop drinking.
- **Do NOT give them coffee:** alcohol and coffee both dehydrates the body. Having both can lead to severe dehydration and permanent brain damage.
- **Do NOT make them sick:** alcohol can interfere with a person's gag reflex, causing them to choke on their own vomit.
- **Do NOT walk them around:** alcohol slows brain function and affects co-ordination and balance. Walking them around might cause accidents.
- **Do NOT put them in a cold shower:** it could dangerously reduce body temperature and lead to hypothermia.
- **Do NOT let them drink more alcohol:** the amount of alcohol in their bloodstream could become even higher – which could put them in further danger.

TIME TO  
REMEMBER.  
TIME TO  
**ACT.**

**X** International Overdose  
Awareness Day

A Pennington Institute Initiative

For more information visit  
[overdoseday.com](http://overdoseday.com)