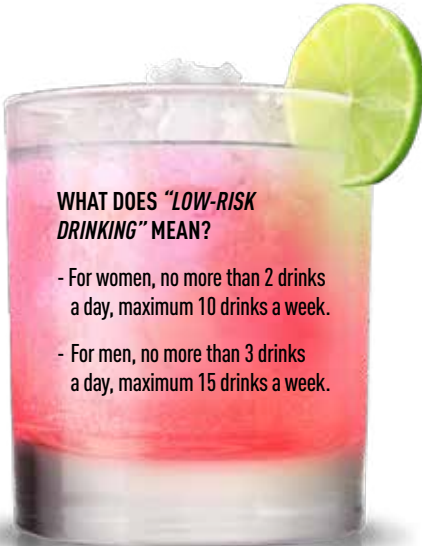


Alcohol and sex



Alcohol, sex and love:

DO THEY STILL GO HAND IN HAND?



**WHAT DOES “LOW-RISK
DRINKING” MEAN?**

- For women, no more than 2 drinks a day, maximum 10 drinks a week.
- For men, no more than 3 drinks a day, maximum 15 drinks a week.

ALCOHOL IS OFTEN AROUND when you're socializing with friends and lovers; and it's usually present when you're available and looking. Alcohol certainly relaxes you and helps you feel less shy. But drinking too much can lead straight to disaster and make a serious mess of friendships, love relationships and sexual relations.

A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP that includes satisfying sex is something most people want. Unfortunately, drinking more than the recommended low-risk amount can result in all kinds of problems. Among other things, it can make you more vulnerable to various forms of sexual violence. It can even lead to sexual assault.



Sure, alcohol REMOVES INHIBITIONS, BUT...

THE LIKELIHOOD OF SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR IS AMPLIFIED when you drink alcohol. The normal progression from a kiss to intimate touching to intercourse speeds up and is intensified, especially when you drink too much. In fact, the more young people drink, the more casual sex they have. After all, alcohol makes you horny!

IS ALCOHOL AN APHRODISIAC? Many people believe it is. Advertising certainly associates drinking with sexual attraction! Pharmacologically speaking, however, it's not necessarily true: research shows that alcohol is an aphrodisiac mainly because people expect it to be.

LOSING YOUR INHIBITIONS IS NOT ALWAYS A GOOD THING. Many people who drank alcohol before or during a sexual encounter say they felt regret afterwards. What seems like a good idea under the influence of alcohol may not seem so great when the effects have worn off. A "yes" at the end of a well-lubricated evening might well have been a "no" had you been sober.

THREE TYPES OF DISINHIBITION

- Euphoric social disinhibition, which makes the drinker feel more sociable and excited.
- Anxious disinhibition, which makes the drinker feel depressed.
- Sexual disinhibition, which affects the drinker's perception of the risks associated with sexual activity.

FYI: Sexual disinhibition is the type most frequently associated with excessive drinking.

ALCOHOL AND MALE *sexual function*

HOW DOES ALCOHOL AFFECT SEXUAL FUNCTION in men? The consensus is that too much alcohol is bad. Chronic drinking interferes with healthy male sexual function because, among other things, it reduces testosterone levels, as well as the quantity of elastic muscle fibres in the penis, which are needed to achieve and maintain an erection.

ALCOHOLIC MEN also complain of such sexual problems as premature ejaculation, a loss of sexual desire, and erectile dysfunction. The likelihood of sexual dysfunction increases with the number of drinks consumed daily.

MODERATE DRINKING IS BENEFICIAL and has a positive effect on erectile function, as it increases the proteins that promote blood flow in the penis. To prevent or minimize erectile dysfunction, it is recommended that men have no more than one or two drinks a day.



What about WOMEN?

THE EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL ON WOMEN have hardly been studied, but it would appear that drinking has a positive impact on female sexual function, including desire, arousal, lubrication and orgasm. However, there seems to be no connection at all between drinking and degree of sexual satisfaction. As for drinking during sex, women under the influence report more problems with sexual function than those who have no alcohol in their bodies.

MODERATE DRINKING can have a positive impact on sexual function in women. In one study, for example, women who drank a moderate amount of red wine, i.e. one or two glasses a day, experienced an improvement in sexual desire, vaginal lubrication and overall sexual function. But it's just one study and nobody should conclude that red wine is good for female sexuality! The data must be interpreted with caution.



Alcohol

AND UNPROTECTED SEX

UNPROTECTED SEX can result in a sexually transmitted disease or an unplanned pregnancy. Unfortunately, drinking increases the likelihood of risky behaviour, specifically having unprotected sex.

PEOPLE ARE LESS LIKELY TO USE A CONDOM when they have sex under the influence of alcohol, or alcohol plus drugs, because of alcohol's disinhibiting effect. It should be said that some young men may be more reluctant to use a condom when they've been drinking, under the mistaken impression that it's socially acceptable and "normal" to do so.

EXCESSIVE DRINKING, particularly among young people who are not used to wearing a condom, makes it more likely that they will have a first sexual encounter without protection, or even use an emergency contraceptive, such as the morning-after pill for girls. They are also at greater risk of contracting a sexually transmitted disease.

THE AMOUNT OF ALCOHOL CONSUMED is less of a determining factor in condom use. People who generally use a condom will continue to do so, even when drunk. Similarly, people who never use condoms aren't likely to do so when they have drunk a lot.



A composite image on a red background. On the left, a clenched fist is shown, wearing a metal link wristwatch. Below the fist is a bottle of wine lying on its side. The bottle label reads 'Vino', 'Cassini Salvignani', and '1997'. To the right of the bottle is a cartoon illustration of a woman with long brown hair lying in bed, covered with a pink and white striped blanket. The background has a faint grid pattern.

Alcohol, sex and violence

ALCOHOL AND THE ASSAILANT. Sadly, the use of force to obtain, or try to obtain, sex without consent often goes hand in hand with drinking. The same holds true for domestic sexual violence. The risk of violence increases with the amount of drinking, no matter whether the assault is committed by a man or a woman. Furthermore, research shows that violence and excessive drinking are related because they share common causes, such as genetic or temperament traits, or other problems found in the antisocial personality.

ALCOHOL AND SEXUAL VICTIMIZATION are also generally related, and the connection goes both ways. Drinking increases the likelihood of becoming a victim of sexual violence, particularly among women; but victims of sexual violence also tend to increase their drinking after an assault. Such people tend to “self-medicate,” meaning that they drink excessively to dull their pain.



Alcohol, desire and emotions

Drinkers, especially men, are more likely to be sexually aggressive if they believe that alcohol can increase their sexual desire. However, the link between alcohol and the need to use force exists more in the drinker's mind and emotions than in reality. Some men make an unhealthy association between drinking and sexual aggression based on:

- their own sexual arousal, which they believe is higher when they are drinking;
- their perception of the woman's arousal, which they tend to exaggerate;
- their right to have sex, which they believe to be legitimate;
- how acceptable they believe forced sex to be, which is higher when they are under the influence.



Alcohol and consent

VICTIMS AND CONSENT. For sexual relations to proceed, there must be consent, which may be given by words or physical cues. The lack of resistance by people who are drunk – which is often invoked in cases of assault on strangers or occasional sex partners – does not constitute consent. In fact, this is a form of sexual violence.

MAKE SURE THERE IS CONSENT

- Consent is an agreement between participants to engage in sexual activity.
- Consent can be given by words or physical cues and must be given freely.
- The absence of resistance does not constitute consent.
- There cannot be consent if the person is unable to communicate it – for example, if the person has a physical or intellectual disability, or is drunk – or if one of the participants is in a position of authority, or uses threats, force or fraud to obtain sex.
- Consent is not valid if it is given by a person who is under the age of 16 or is in a position of dependence.
- A person can consent to sex and then change their mind and withdraw it, using words or actions.
- Simply stating that you thought the other person had given their consent does not constitute sufficient evidence for a consent defence.



Alcohol
and rape

VULNERABILITY TO SEXUAL VIOLENCE. Excessive drinking can lead to a certain kind of myopia that reduces a person's ability to recognize danger signals and situations with the potential for sexual assault. In fact, getting the victim drunk can be a deliberate tactic by the perpetrator.

ALCOHOL IS OFTEN A RAPE DRUG. Occasionally, you hear or see a news story about someone who put the so-called rape drug (GHB) in a person's drink and then raped them. While such assaults do occur, they are rare. Far more common is absence-of-consent rape, where the victim willingly drank alcohol but was too drunk to consent to sex. It is difficult to establish with any certainty the number of these rapes, but they are far more frequent than those resulting from GHB intoxication.

RAPE AT STANFORD

A big news story of 2016 concerned a young woman who had been sexually assaulted while she was unconscious, during a party at Stanford University. At the trial, the assailant said he had found himself on the ground with the young woman, because she had fallen down. As part of a statement read to the court, the victim said this: "If a girl falls down, help her get back up. If she is too drunk to even walk and falls down, do not mount her, hump her, take off her underwear, and insert your hand inside her vagina. If a girl falls down, help her up."

RAPE AND DRUGS

A recent Quebec study found that about 75% of sexual assault victims had alcohol in their blood when the assault took place. Alcohol is the substance most often present in sexual assault cases. That makes alcohol the real "rape drug."



Alcohol and sex: BEHAVING RESPONSIBLY

THE FACTS ARE DISTURBING. The link between drinking and sexual violence also depends on the norms and expectations of a given group or society. For example, American universities with permissive policies regarding alcohol possession are the ones reporting the greatest number of sexual assaults.

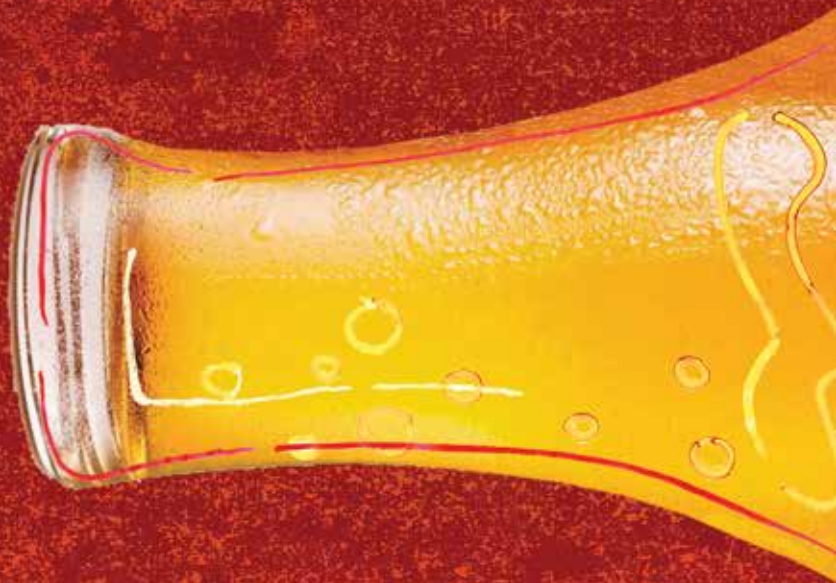
HOW ARE THINGS IN QUEBEC? Although it is illegal to do so, many bars and clubs in Quebec regularly offer women drinks at significant discounts, and sometimes even for free. Some bars very popular among CEGEP and university students have “Ladies Nights,” when women can drink as much as they like at no charge. Such practices are unethical, dangerous and illegal, and people must speak out against them in no uncertain terms. It is unacceptable that such business practices – which are tantamount to aiding and abetting rape – should exist in Quebec.

PREVENTING SEXUAL VIOLENCE is primarily a matter of not drinking too much. Drinking moderately can help potential victims recognize red flags and danger signals. And reining in their drinking can help keep potential assailants from becoming disinhibited and adopting attitudes and behaviours that could lead to sexual assault.

Drinking a small amount of alcohol may promote intimacy and sexual relations, but no study has ever shown that drinking a great deal can in any way be beneficial! When it comes to love and sex, once again, moderation is always in good taste.



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