

ALCOHOL

Found In

Beer, cider, Alco-pops, Alco-milks, spirits (including meths/white spirit), wine, etc.

Description

Sold as alcoholic beverages of many forms, also available from DIY shops (meths/white spirit).

Routes of Use

Oral.

History

Alcohol has been used throughout history as a social drink and in medicinal remedies. Earliest records from ancient Egypt depict fermentation of fruits to produce primitive beers. It is used throughout the world in many cultures and is thought of generally as an acceptable social drug.

Effects People Seek

The effects of alcohol begin within minutes and may last for several hours. Alcohol is a depressant drug (not a stimulant as many people think), it slows down the brain and hence the body's reactions. Common effects experienced include loss of inhibitions; relaxation, talkativeness and a 'warm feeling' of enhanced well being. Other effects: The higher the dose the worse the effects. There can be a loss of control over speech, vision, the limbs, consciousness and even life. The lowering of reaction times and impairing of judgement makes driving extremely hazardous. Methylated spirits can also cause permanent damage to the eyes leading to blindness. Most people vomit and dehydrate after a drinking binge. Long term and heavy drinking has been linked to liver damage, heart disease, brain damage, certain cancers, pancreatitis and several other disorders of the reproductive system and sexual organs. Also risky sexual behaviour (unprotected sex) whilst drunk can expose people to sexually transmitted diseases.

Dependence & Tolerance

There can be both physical and psychological dependence to the effects of alcohol. The tolerance to these effects increases with regular drinking therefore more drink is required to produce the same effects. Long term heavy drinking can be very damaging to major body organs. Physical dependence develops as people drink more. Withdrawal symptoms (such as trembling, sweating, anxiety and delirium) are experienced if they try to stop.

The Law

It is not illegal for anyone over 5 years old to consume alcohol away from licensed premises. It is an offence for a licensee to sell, knowingly, to an under 18 year old. A 14-year-old can go into a pub alone and not consume alcohol. A 16 year old can be sold and consume Beer, Port, Cider or Perry (but not Spirits) in a pub if having a meal in an area set-aside for this purpose. In some cities and towns there are by-laws restricting the drinking of alcohol on the streets at any age. Police also have the powers to confiscate alcohol from under 18's who drink in public places. In addition there are laws relating to being 'drunk and disorderly and being in charge of an infant whilst intoxicated. It is legal in this country to purchase or drink alcohol over the age of 18. It is legal to produce your own beer and wine but not spirits. There are limits to the amount you can drink before being in charge of a road vehicle.