

# How do you look after a drunk friend?

**Helping a drunk friend can be difficult and potentially dangerous. Often, the person may be aggressive and uncooperative. While it is important to try to keep your friend safe, the first priority must always be your personal safety. Never be afraid to pass the problem over to someone else, particularly if they become violent. If in doubt, always call 000.**

**ALWAYS REMEMBER, YOU ARE A FRIEND, NOT A DOCTOR.**

Here are some simple things you can do to look after a drunk friend who is feeling unwell:

- **Stay with them and never leave them alone**
- **Monitor them**
- **Reassure them**
- **Keep them comfortable**

- **Keep them upright**
- **Keep them hydrated**
- **If in doubt, call for help**

If your drunk friend is vomiting extra care needs to be taken. Vomiting can be life-threatening even when alcohol is not involved. For more information on looking after someone who is vomiting go to the 'How do you look after a vomiting drunk friend?' fact sheet. If you are worried about a drunk friend's wellbeing, for any reason, call 000 immediately.

Be aware that the police do not routinely attend an ambulance call, even if there are illegal drugs involved. The only reason the police will usually attend is if the paramedics ask them to be there. This is usually due to another crime taking place or the threat of violence.

## Why should you be concerned about a drunk friend?

When someone drinks too much alcohol this can lead to an overdose. Overdoses can range in severity, from problems standing and slurred speech through to vomiting, unconsciousness and even death. Underage drinkers are at particular risk for alcohol overdose, mainly due to their lack of drinking experience and their inability to break down alcohol as effectively as adults. As alcohol builds up in the body, blood alcohol concentration (BAC) increases and the person becomes drunk.

Their coordination is affected, they may start to feel sick and their judgment becomes clouded. They may also experience 'blackouts' – short periods of time when they can't remember exactly what happened. When drunk, a person could easily get hurt due to a simple fall, be left vulnerable to sexual assault or other acts of violence, and make poor decisions around a range of risk behaviours, such as unprotected or unintended sex and drink driving. If they continue to drink alcohol poisoning may occur (for more details on alcohol poisoning see the 'Alcohol poisoning' fact sheet).

Drunk people are not able to make good decisions about their safety, therefore it is important that friends look out for each other when alcohol is being consumed.

## What if your drunk friend does not want your help?

Not all drunk people want to be looked after and some can be extremely difficult to deal with. Some people become aggressive when they drink and are potentially dangerous. Your first priority must always be your personal safety – never put yourself into a situation where you could get hurt. If your friend does not want your help, pass the problem onto someone else and if you are really worried about their safety call 000.

## Things to do if your drunk friend is feeling unwell

- **Stay with them and never leave them alone** – being alone when you are unwell, particularly if you have been drinking, is incredibly dangerous. It is vital that you stay with your drunk friend at all times. Leaving them alone for even a short period of time

### Medical Disclaimer

The information provided on this fact sheet is provided for information purposes only. As such it **cannot substitute for the advice of a medical professional**

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is highly risky. Letting a friend go to the toilet to be sick is a potentially life-threatening situation. If the person passes out and they've locked the door, how is help going to get in? Never, ever let someone go to the toilet, or anywhere else for that matter, by themselves to be sick

- **Monitor them** – the line between being drunk and being poisoned can be fine. If a person is already unwell and has drunk alcohol in the past hour or so, there is every likelihood that they could become worse as that alcohol is yet to be absorbed and reach the brain. It is essential that someone stays with a person who is feeling unwell after drinking alcohol and makes sure they stay with them until they are feeling better
- **Reassure them** – when you are feeling unwell after drinking it can be very frightening. Adding to the discomfort for young people is the fear that their parents may discover what they have been up to or that the police may become involved. Friends being close, reassuring them that everything will be okay is important
- **Keep them comfortable** – if they are very drunk the alcohol can cause their body temperature to drop and possibly lead to hypothermia. Drape something over their shoulders, particularly if they are outdoors
- **Keep them upright** – never lay a drunk person down. They are much more difficult to monitor effectively if they are laying down and if they vomit, even a small amount, there is the very real risk of choking. If they are so drunk that they are unable to sit up then the person should be laid on their side in the recovery position and watched carefully
- **Keep them hydrated** – this does not mean make them drink as much water as possible. The key is to ensure lost fluids are replaced, i.e., if they have been sweating or urinating a lot, they need to drink water. Give them an open bottle of water and ask them to “Drink when you feel like it” – they need to listen to their own body. Forcing them to drink large amounts of water is not going to make them feel any better and can actually cause harm in extreme cases

- **If in doubt, call for help** – this does not always mean calling 000 as most drunk people do not need to be treated by medical professionals. That said, looking after drunk people can be quite frightening, particularly for young people. As soon as you feel you're not able to deal with the situation, pass the problem onto a sober, responsible adult. It's hard to be specific as to what constitutes a 'medical emergency' but it is imperative that young people are aware that they won't get into trouble for calling an ambulance. Even if the ambulance arrives and the situation has resolved itself – it's better to be safe than sorry.

Be aware that the police do not routinely attend an ambulance call, even if there are illegal drugs involved. They certainly don't attend every ambulance call to assist a drunk person. The only reason the police will usually attend is if the paramedics ask them to be there. This is usually due to another crime taking place or the threat of violence.

### Things to do once your drunk friend is feeling better

- **Make sure they rehydrate** – alcohol dehydrates and this is one of the main causes of a hangover. If the person feels bad now, they're highly likely to feel much worse the morning after – drinking a couple of glasses of water at the end of the night is not going to completely prevent this but it won't hurt
- **Make sure they get home safely and check on them the day after** – if your friend has had a bad experience with alcohol at a party or gathering, it is highly likely that others are aware of what happened. This can be a traumatic and embarrassing experience, and it can take some time for the person to recover. Getting them home or handing them over to someone you trust is important but giving them a reassuring call the next day can make all the difference