

How do you look after a drunk friend?

Although many people consume alcohol safely, things can go wrong especially when people drink too much, too quickly.

Whether you are drinking alcohol or not, there are a number of 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 warm**
- **keep them as upright as possible and never lay them down**
- **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.

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.

Helping a drunk friend can be difficult and potentially dangerous. 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, call 000.

ALWAYS REMEMBER, YOU ARE A FRIEND, NOT A DOCTOR

Why should you be concerned about a drunk friend?

When someone drinks too much alcohol, it can lead to an overdose. Overdoses can range in severity from difficulties standing and slurred speech to vomiting, unconsciousness and even death. Underage drinkers are at particular risk of alcohol overdose, mainly due to their lack of drinking experience and their body's 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. At this point, their coordination is affected; they may start to feel sick and their judgment becomes confused. They may also experience 'blackouts' – short periods of time when they can't remember exactly what happened. When drunk, a person can easily get hurt due to a simple fall; be left vulnerable to sexual assault or other acts of violence or make poor decisions with a range of risky behaviours, such as unprotected or unintended sex or 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 in 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, can be dangerous. It is vital that you stay with your drunk friend at all times. Leaving them alone for even a short period of time is highly

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risky. Letting a friend go to the toilet to be sick, or anywhere else for that matter, is a potentially life-threatening situation. If the person passes out and they've locked the door, how is help going to get in?

Monitor them – the line between being drunk and being poisoned can be fine. If your friend is already drunk and has consumed alcohol in the past hour or so, it is likely that they will become worse before they get better, since 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 until they are feeling better.

Reassure them – your friend might be upset or scared as a result of getting drunk. They could also be worried that their parents may discover what they have been up to or that the police may become involved. It is important to keep your friend calm and reassure them that everything will be okay.

Keep them warm – alcohol can cause a drop in body temperature, possibly leading to hypothermia. If your friend is cold and shivering, place something warm around them, particularly if they are outdoors.

Keep them as upright as possible and never lay them down – if they are laying on their back they are difficult to monitor effectively and, if they vomit even a small amount, there is the very real risk of choking. If your friend is so drunk that they are unable to sit up, place them on their side in the recovery position and watch them 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" – it's best that they listen to what their body is telling them. 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 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.

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.

Make sure they get home safely and check on them the next day

Once they start to feel a little better, make sure they rehydrate before you let them leave. Alcohol is a diuretic, meaning it removes fluids from the body and so drinking too much can lead to dehydration. This causes many of the symptoms 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 a hangover but it will help to some extent.

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 an embarrassing and traumatic experience, and it can take some time for the person to recover. Getting your friend home safely or handing them over to someone you trust is important but giving them a reassuring call the next day to make sure they're okay can make all the difference to how they cope with what happened to them.