Alcohol & Drug Use Information

[The following materials were originally developed by counselors at the University of Western Ontario. Some of the content has been altered to fit better with CSUN students’ needs, but we thank Student Health Services at the University of Western Ontario for providing such an excellent guide]

1. How do I know if I have a drinking problem?

Some signs that a person has a drinking problem are if:

- they drink to relieve pain or stress
- they drink in the morning, or at a regular time every day
- alcohol seems to be the centre of all their activities
- they drink when it’s important to stay sober
- they have missed classes or meals because of drinking
- they’ve had to leave somewhere because of excessive drinking
- they often get black-outs and can't remember the night before
- they buy drinks with money that could have been better spent elsewhere
- they find themselves in unplanned sexual situations when drinking

If you can say "yes" to some of the above, then alcohol might be a problem in your life.

2. I think I may have a drinking problem, what can I do?

You have recognized that you have a drinking problem which is a big step. There are several organizations that can help you deal with an alcohol problem. Contact the Klotz Student Health Center and make an appointment with Janis Martin for educational resources, a medical doctor for a physical examination and/or blood test to assess overall physical health, and contact University Counseling Services and make an appointment to discuss your situation with a counselor.

The Addiction Research Foundation (ARF) http://www.camh.net/ provides information on alcohol and other drugs. Whatever you choose to do, remember that it is vitally important that you be the one who makes the choice. No human being can bring about changes in your lifestyle other than you.
3. I get along with my friend great, but when he starts drinking he becomes a real jerk. What can I do?

Intoxicated people often say things that are uncharacteristic for their sober self, so don't take everything they say personally. The following are some suggestions for acting as effectively as possible:

• Let your friend know that you are concerned.
• Speak clearly and directly without shouting.
• Do not let the other person put you on the defensive about your drinking.
• Confront behavior, not values.
• Let your friend clearly know what you want him/her to do.
• Know the basic facts about alcohol but avoid coming across as an expert.
• Try to get the person to agree to some form of positive action.

Don't lose your cool. Do not get drawn into arguments about why you are intervening. Develop a clear explanation for yourself ahead of time, i.e. "I'm concerned about your safety" or "Your behavior is unacceptable, we just want to get you someplace where you can sober up."

• Don't get drawn into physical confrontation with someone who is intoxicated and physically aggressive. If necessary call campus (677-2111) or city police (911) to help subdue the person.
• This is no time to try and teach information about alcohol. Remember you are dealing with someone who is drunk.
• If this person is a friend it would be appropriate to express your concern about them after they sober up. If necessary make them aware of resources on and off campus which can help them deal with their drinking.

(Adapted from Rutgers Alcohol Education Manual.)

4. My friend drank too much and began vomiting. What should I do if this situation ever arises again?

Check that your friend is breathing normally. If breathing is irregular or skin tone purplish wake him/her immediately. If there is no response, call for medical help. If the person responds, make sure he/she is lying on their side to prevent choking, if they vomit again. Check regularly to make sure he/she is still positioned correctly. Your friend must not be left alone. There is danger of a drunk person vomiting or choking on their own vomit. If he/she has stopped breathing, proceed with mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and get medical help immediately.
5. What's the problem with drinking games?

Drinking alcohol very quickly, can dangerously increase your blood alcohol levels. Elevated blood alcohol levels suppress the body’s ability to respond to stimuli and can possibly cause respiratory and circulatory failure. As a result, too much alcohol in the bloodstream is a very real danger which can cause someone to pass-out, choke on their own vomit and die. If someone passes-out call for immediate medical help.

6. What are some of the effects of alcohol?

Short term effects of alcohol include:

- central nervous system is depressed
- judgment, memory and sensory perception are progressively impaired
- sleepiness and disruption of sleeping patterns.

Long term effects include:

- killing of brain cells
- irritation of stomach and small intestines
- pancreatic disorders
- heart problems
- high blood pressure.

7. Is it true that coffee (caffeine products) can help you sober up?

The short answer to the question is no, caffeine products do not speed up the process of becoming sober. Your liver is responsible for eliminating the toxins (including alcohol) from your bloodstream. The liver eliminates alcohol at a fixed rate over time. The time frame required to reduce your B.A.C. (blood alcohol content) may be different for each person. Bottom line: If you have been drinking, no amount of coffee is going to make you a safe driver - you coordination and concentration will remain impaired until your liver has had time to do its job. There is no way to speed up the process.

So what is happening when you feel more alert after a couple of cups of coffee? Your body is responding to the caffeine. Caffeine stimulates the central nervous system and may cause you to feel more awake and clear-headed -but don't be fooled. That caffeine stimulated alert-feeling does not signal that you're B.A.C. has dropped or that you are sobering up. In fact, hot liquids have been shown to increase the rate at which alcohol is absorbed through your stomach and into your bloodstream. Speeding up alcohol absorption into the bloodstream does
nothing to speed up the liver’s rate of toxin elimination. So, the long answer to the question is that the only thing that drinking coffee will do is help you pass the time - and time is exactly what your liver needs. Coffee does not sober you up.