

Boozing it up can be costly

Unless you're 21, drinking alcohol is illegal. One sip of beer, wine or whiskey, and you could wind up handcuffed in the back of a squad car. Let's be real: There's just no way underage drinking could be worth all the embarrassment, the threat to your future or the legal ramifications associated with being arrested.

You might mistake alcohol for a harmless high or an innocent way to overcome social inhibitions. But downing a few beers or shots of vodka can have plenty of short-term negative consequences, like slurred speech, vomiting, poor judgement and a horrible next-day hangover/headache, to name a few.

The possible long-term negative effects are even scarier. Alcohol abuse can cause cirrhosis of the liver (where your normally soft, pink liver turns black and rock-hard), brain damage, convulsions, stomach ailments, sexual impotence and heart damage.

According to MADD, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Americans spend more than \$5.5 billion on alcohol each year. That's more than they spend on soft drinks, milk, juice, tea, coffee and bottled kombucha.

More to the point, MADD reports:

- The younger people are when they start drinking alcohol, the more likely it is that they will become alcoholics – so dependent on alcohol they can't function day to day.
- *Young people are 6.5 times more likely to be killed by alcohol than by all other illegal drugs combined.*
- Auto accidents, homicides and suicides are the top causes of death for 15 to 24-year-olds, and alcohol factors prominently in all three.
- *Nearly 40 percent of traffic deaths have an alcohol component, and alcohol contributes to 300,000 injuries in the United States each year. If you doubt this is true, then pay close attention to TV news accounts each year around the time that schools take their spring breaks. You'll undoubtedly hear of some students who lost their lives due to irresponsible drinking.*