Health and Safety Concerns:

Alcohol is a drug. And, since in our culture, there tends to be a minimization of the negative impacts of alcohol use (a belief that there is a low risk to its use), it is widely used and is deeply engrained in our culture and society. First use often begins in high school or earlier, and continues throughout the life span.

Consumption of Alcohol can have significant health effects on the body—in both the short and long term. Alcohol interferes with the brain's communication pathways, and will impact how the brain looks and works. These disruptions in communication can change a person's mood and behavior, and can impact judgement, coordination, problem solving and decision making. In the short term, alcohol in regulated doses, will allow the user to feel an increased sense of euphoria, increased self-confidence (decreases inhibitions), increased sociability, decreased anxiety, impaired judgement, shortened attention span, and an impairment in fine muscle coordination. To a certain level, alcohol is used as a "social enhancer", but once a person gets to a certain level of BAC, it tends to become a "social blocker".

Higher doses in the short term can lead to:
- Sedation effects
- Confusion
- Impaired memory and comprehension
- Delayed reactions
- Ataxia; balance difficulty; unbalanced walk
- Blurred vision
- Impaired senses
- Impaired speech, staggering
- Dizziness
- Vomiting
- Lapses in and out of consciousness
- Amnesia
- Respiratory depression
- Decreased heart rate
- Loss of control of bowels and/or bladder
- Impaired judgement and self-control
- Increased aggression (in some people)
- Decreased ability to appropriately read social and environmental cues

Alcohol is a drug that is easily "mis-dosed" or "over-dosed". A Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC—percentage of alcohol in the bloodstream) level of a .10 means that .1% of your bloodstream is composed of alcohol. A range of .35% to .40% is a range in which fatal consequences can occur for approximately half of the population. Heavy Long Term drinkers can have numbers much higher than that. However, for most first time drinkers (or inexperienced drinkers), "pass out" (unconsciousness) can occur at approximately .15% of the research evidence indicates that the more alcohol a person drinks—particularly the more alcohol a person drinks regularly over time—the higher his or her risk of developing an alcohol-associated cancer. Based on data from 2009, an estimated 3.5 percent of all cancer deaths in the United States (about 19,500 deaths) were alcohol related.

Some of the specific types of cancer include, but are not limited to:

- **Head and neck cancer**: Alcohol consumption is a major risk factor for certain head and neck cancers, particularly cancers of the oral cavity (excluding the lips), pharynx (throat), and larynx (voice box). People who consume 50 or more grams of alcohol per day (approximately 3.5 or more drinks per day) have at least a two to three times greater risk of developing these cancers than nondrinkers. Moreover, the risks of these cancers are substantially higher among persons who consume this amount of alcohol and also use tobacco.
- **Esophageal cancer**: Alcohol consumption is a major risk factor for a particular type of esophageal cancer called esophageal squamous cell carcinoma. In addition, people who inherit a deficiency in an enzyme that metabolizes alcohol have been found to have substantially increased risks of alcohol-related esophageal squamous cell carcinoma.
- **Liver cancer**: Alcohol consumption is an independent risk factor for, and a primary cause of, liver cancer (hepatocellular carcinoma). (Chronic infection with hepatitis B virus and hepatitis C virus are the other major causes of liver cancer.)
- **Breast cancer**: More than 100 epidemiologic studies have looked at the association between alcohol consumption and the risk of breast cancer in women.
- **Mouth and throat cancer**

Studies have consistently found an increased risk of breast cancer associated with increasing alcohol intake. A meta-analysis of 53 of studies (which included a total of 58,000 women with breast cancer) showed that women who drank more than 45 grams of alcohol per day (approximately three drinks) had 1.5 times the risk of developing breast cancer as nondrinkers (a modestly increased risk). The risk of breast cancer was higher across all levels of alcohol intake: for every 10 grams of alcohol consumed per day (slightly less than one drink), researchers observed a small (7 percent) increase in the risk of breast cancer. The Million Women Study in the United Kingdom (which included more than 28,000 women with breast cancer) provided a more recent, and slightly higher, estimate of breast cancer risk at low to moderate levels of alcohol consumption: every 10 grams of alcohol consumed per day was associated with a 12 percent increase in the risk of breast cancer.

- **Colorectal cancer**: Alcohol consumption is associated with a modestly increased risk of cancers of the colon and rectum. A meta-analysis of 57 cohort and case-control studies that examined the association between alcohol consumption and colorectal cancer risk showed that people who regularly drank 50 or more grams of alcohol per day (approximately 3.5 drinks) had 1.5 times the risk of developing colorectal cancer as nondrinkers or occasional drinkers. For every 10 grams of alcohol consumed per day, there was a small (7 percent) increase in the risk of colorectal cancer.

Information gathered from the NIAAA & CDC websites:

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