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### **Heart-Healthy Tips: Alcohol Consumption**

As first responders, you see firsthand how alcohol affects a person's judgment when you respond to alcohol-related motor vehicle accidents. Alcohol depresses your central nervous system, lowers your inhibitions, and impairs your judgment. Use this information to educate your department about healthy alcohol consumption.

Alcohol affects every organ in the body. It is a central nervous system depressant that is rapidly absorbed from the stomach and small intestine into the bloodstream. Alcohol is metabolized in the liver by enzymes; however, the liver can only metabolize a small amount of alcohol at a time, leaving the excess alcohol to circulate throughout the body. The intensity of the effect of alcohol on the body is directly related to the amount consumed.

Here are some tips and facts that you need to know about alcohol consumption:

- It is the amount of ethanol consumed that affects a person most, not the type of alcoholic drink. Ethanol is an intoxicating ingredient found in beer, wine, and liquor.
- Drinking alcohol leads to a loss of coordination, poor judgment, slowed reflexes, distorted vision, memory lapses, and even blackouts.
- Drinking large amounts of alcohol at one time or very rapidly can cause alcohol poisoning, which can lead to coma or death.
- When drinking, keep track of how much you drink.
- When you do drink, pace yourself. Sip slowly and drink non-alcoholic drinks such as water, soda, or juice between alcoholic drinks.
- Don't drink on an empty stomach. Always eat some food prior to drinking so the alcohol will be absorbed more slowly into your system.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture and Department of Health and Human Services recommend that if you choose to drink alcoholic beverages, you do not exceed 1 drink per day for women and 2 drinks per day for men.

*Sources: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism; Food Standards Agency*

*Find more health and wellness tips and resources for first responders at [www.healthy-firefighter.org](http://www.healthy-firefighter.org).*