

## COMMON MYTHS ABOUT ALCOHOL

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Can drinking stop the teenage brain from growing? Duke University researchers scanned the brains of teens recovering from drinking problems. They found that teens that drank a lot had a smaller prefrontal cortex than those who did not. The prefrontal cortex is the part of the brain responsible for judgment and critical thinking. Dr. Michael Fishman, the director of the adult addiction medicine program at Ridgeview Institute in Atlanta says, "If you have a prefrontal cortex that does not mature as it's supposed to as an adolescent and young adult, it could possibly impede many different areas of our lives. We could become more impulsive, have poor decision-making, our judgment could be off, and we might not be able to learn as well as other people." And--- the research suggests---the damage is permanent. Dr. Fishman says, "You only have so much time for the brain to mature, and the brain is not as forgiving of an organ as the liver that might regenerate after damage." He says parents should explain that the brain does not fully mature until age 25, and that binge drinking, even once a month, may cause damage.

(Source: [www.connectwithkids.com](http://www.connectwithkids.com))

- **MYTH:** All teenagers will drink at some point, no matter how we try to stop them.  
**FACT:** Although underage drinking is a serious problem, 81% of adolescents ages 12-17 have chosen not to drink in the past year.
- **MYTH:** My son or daughter knows everything about drinking, so we don't need to talk about it.  
**FACT:** Many teenagers have dangerous misconceptions about alcohol---for example, they don't realize that wine coolers have the same alcohol content as a shot of distilled spirits, or they think they can sober up by drinking coffee or getting fresh air.
- **MYTH:** What parents say or do won't make any difference; teens only listen to their friends.  
**FACT:** Parents can be very influential. A study of adolescents and their families conducted by the Research Institute on Addictions revealed that adolescent girls and boys, regardless of race or income level, whose parents supervise their friendships and activities, are less likely to engage in problem behaviors, including drinking.
- **MYTH:** He only drinks beer. It's a phase---he'll get over it, just like I did.  
**FACT:** Adolescents who begin drinking before age 15 or younger are four times more likely to develop problems of alcohol use and dependence than those who begin drinking at age 21 or older. Many engage in binge drinking, which is drinking five or more drinks on one occasion. Some people mistakenly believe that beer and wine are light in alcohol content, when in fact they are not.
- **MYTH:** It's okay for young people to drink, just as long as they don't drive. The worst that can happen is that he'll wake up with a terrible hangover.  
**FACT:** WRONG. If you drink a lot of alcohol quickly, it can build up in your body so much that you can die from alcohol poisoning within only a few hours. As well, you're more prone to injury, which can be serious or fatal. And, anyone who drinks and drives could severely injure or kill someone, including themselves.
- **MYTH:** Alcohol is not such a big deal, compared with illicit drugs.  
**FACT:** Alcohol is a factor in the three leading causes of deaths among 14 and 15 year olds: unintentional injuries, homicides, and suicides.
- **MYTH:** Teens can't become alcoholics because they haven't been drinking long enough.  
**FACT:** You can develop alcoholism at any age. It depends on how much and how often you drink. As well, heavy drinking and binge drinking by anyone can be very harmful, whether or not they're alcohol-dependent.

(Source: SAMHSA; Napa County Resource Guide for Parents)