

Alcohol poisoning

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In Finland, over 400 people die of alcohol poisoning every year. In addition, a few hundred people die of a poisoning caused by the joint effect of alcohol and a pharmaceutical product. Compared to the rest of the world, deaths by alcohol poisoning are very frequent in Finland and many-fold compared to for example the other Nordic countries.

Alcohol poisoning is caused by drinking a large amount of alcohol very quickly. Most people are in danger of dying of alcohol poisoning when their blood alcohol content is over 0.3%. The surest way to avoid an alcohol poisoning is to drink only little or not at all. One drink or a bottle of beer raises the blood alcohol content by 0.02% or more, depending on the person's weight. Drinking a bottle of spirits in a short time may raise the blood alcohol content dangerously high. Drinking heavily may also lead to a blackout, and you may lose your ability to control your drinking. Most of the deaths caused by poisoning are accidents.

Who, then, are at risk? Children consuming alcohol for the first or second time are in real mortal danger. Most victims of alcohol poisonings are, however, middle-aged men who consume alcohol heavily. Repeated states of intoxication do not protect them from the risk of alcohol poisoning, even if their tolerance for alcohol had increased exceptionally.

Injuries, drowning and other accidents are common with people who are very intoxicated. However, only those occasions where alcohol has caused a person to stop breathing, to have a cardiac arrest or to suffocate in vomit after passing out are considered deaths by alcohol poisoning. A sudden cardiac arrest may occur as a result of arrhythmia during withdrawal. Death by alcohol poisoning may, in other words, take place even when the blood alcohol content is under 0.3%.

What can you do when your friend passes out? Don't leave him. If you can't wake him up, take him to the hospital for examinations and monitoring. If you can wake him up for a while, turn him on his side so that he will not suffocate in his own vomit. You must continue to monitor him, and if something happens, e.g. he has trouble breathing, take him to the hospital. Passing out is usually followed by a severe hangover. Resting in a peaceful environment will help. Avoid physical strain. Do not try to alleviate your hangover with alcohol. Sugary beverages and clear soups in small portions are much better cures for a hangover.

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