Selected Research on Underage Drinking

There is a vast body of research on the consequences of underage drinking and its connection to other substance use. This is a small sample of resources that we have found particularly helpful.

Ten-Year Prospective Study of Public Health Problems Associated With Early Drinking

* Authors: Phyllis L. Ellickson, PhD, Joan S. Tucker, PhD, and David J. Klein, MS
* Published in: Pediatrics, Volume 111, Number 5, May 1, 2003, pp. 949–955
* Available [here](http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/111/5/949.short)

**Note:** The text below is slightly adapted from the article abstract on the *Pediatrics* journal website, copyright © 2013 American Academy of Pediatrics.

The objective of this study was to compare early nondrinkers, experimenters, and drinkers on the prevalence of problem behaviors at three different ages. Respondents were originally recruited from 30 California and Oregon schools in grade 7 (1985, N = 6,338) and assessed again in grade 12 (1990, *N* = 4,265) and at age 23 (1995, *N* = 3,369).

The researchers found that early drinkers and experimenters were more likely than nondrinkers to report academic problems, substance use, and delinquent behavior in both middle and high school. By young adulthood, early alcohol use was associated with employment problems, other substance use, and criminal and violent behavior. The researchers concluded that early drinkers do not necessarily mature out of a problematic lifestyle as young adults. Interventions for these high-risk youth should start early and address their other public health problems, particularly their tendency to smoke and use other illicit drugs.

Early Drinking Onset and Its Association with Alcohol Use and Problem Behavior in Late Adolescence

* Authors: Enid Gruber, Ph.D., Ralph J. DiClemente, Ph.D., Martin M. Anderson, M.D., and Mark Lodico, Ph.D.
* Published in *Preventive Medicine*, Volume 25, Issue 3, May 1996, pp. 293–300
* Available [here](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0091743596900596)

**Note:** The text below is slightly adapted from the article abstract on the ScienceDirect website, copyright © 2015 Elsevier B.V.

The objective of this study was to examine the relationship between age of drinking onset and patterns of use, the use of other substances, and the prevalence of other alcohol-related problems in a population of Midwestern high school seniors. Respondents comprised 2,650 male and female seniors, representing a 10% random sample of all white seniors in the 1989 Minnesota Student Survey.

The researchers found indications that early onset of alcohol use (by age 12) is associated with subsequent misuse of alcohol and related problem behaviors in later adolescence, including alcohol-related violence, injuries, drinking and driving, and absenteeism from school or work, as well as increased risks for using other drugs. They concluded that ages 10–12 are a particularly vulnerable period for the development of early alcohol dependence and misuse. Delaying alcohol use onset to age 13 may significantly reduce the risk of severe alcohol misuse in later adolescence.

Strategies to Prevent Underage Drinking

* Authors: Kelli A. Komro, M.P.H., Ph.D., and Traci L. Toomey, M.P.H., Ph.D.
* Available from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism [website](http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/arh26-1/5-14.htm)

**Note:** The text below is slightly adapted from the article’s introductory text and Conclusion on the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism website.

The authors note that alcohol use by underage drinkers is a persistent public health problem in the United States and that alcohol is the most commonly used drug among adolescents. Accordingly, numerous approaches to prevent underage drinking have been developed and studied:

* School-based approaches, involving curricula targeted at preventing alcohol, tobacco, or marijuana use
* Extracurricular approaches, offering activities outside of school in the form of social or life skills training or alternative activities
* Family approaches, striving to involve the adolescents’ families in the prevention programs
* Policy approaches, for example, increasing the minimum legal drinking age, reducing the commercial and social access of adolescents to alcohol, and reducing the economic availability of alcohol
* Community-based approaches, involving the entire community

The authors explore each approach in detail and offer a number of examples of programs employing these strategies. They conclude that any program by itself is unlikely to create sustained reductions in underage drinking. School-based programs may need to be combined with extracurricular, family, and policy strategies that help change the overall social and cultural environment in which young people live in order to create sustained decreases in consumption and alcohol-related problems among youth. As researchers, clinicians, and policymakers learn more about each strategy, this knowledge must be synthesized to develop multicomponent projects consisting of high-quality and complementary components that together create interventions strong enough to overcome the drinking culture found throughout U.S. communities.

Reducing Underage Drinking: A Collective Responsibility

* Authors: National Research Council and Institute of Medicine. Committee on Developing a Strategy to Reduce and Prevent Underage Drinking, Richard J. Bonnie and Mary Ellen O’Connell (Editors). Board on Children, Youth, and Families, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education.
* Published by the National Academies Press, Washington, D.C. (2004)
* A PDF of this book may be downloaded [here](http://www.nap.edu/%20catalog/10729/reducing-underage-drinking-a-collective-responsibility)

**Note:** The text below is slightly adapted from the Description on the National Academies Press website, copyright © 2015 National Academy of Sciences.

Given its association with traffic fatalities, violence, unsafe sex, suicide, educational failure, and other problem behaviors that diminish the prospects of future success, underage alcohol use is extremely dangerous. The earlier teens start drinking, the greater the danger.

Why is this dangerous behavior so pervasive? What can be done to prevent it? What will work, and who is responsible for making sure that it happens? *Reducing Underage Drinking* explores the ways in which different individuals and groups contribute to the problem and how they can be enlisted to prevent it, and proposes a new way to combat underage alcohol use.