

FACT SHEET 5

ALCOHOL AND SWIMMING



COMMON SENSE TELLS US NOT TO DRINK AND EITHER SWIM, SURF, FISH FROM ROCKS, OPERATE A BOAT OR DRIVE - WATER AND ALCOHOL DO NOT MIX!

Drinking alcohol impairs your senses, encouraging risk-taking behaviour, meaning you are more likely to get into trouble. If you drink and get into the water, tired muscles and confusion from being under the influence of alcohol, makes it harder to get out of trouble.

There is a range of physical changes which occur when an individual consumes alcohol and then engages in aquatic activity. These include (but are not limited to):

DISTURBANCE OF THE INNER EAR

Fluid in the ear is responsible for balance. Alcohol and a sudden change in temperature can lead to disorientation. Diving into the water is a perfect opportunity for this: all of a sudden, up becomes down.

HYPOTHERMIA

Alcohol increases blood flow to the arms and legs, even when the body would normally try to stop this action to save from heat loss. If you fall into cold water under the influence of alcohol, hypothermia could potentially occur.

SPASM OF THE VOCAL CHORDS

Water in the windpipe triggers a reflex closure of the windpipe. Alcohol increases the chance that a spasm of the vocal chords will occur, snapping the airway closed. The combination of water and alcohol can lock the airway closed, making breathing difficult.

LACK OF COORDINATION

Alcohol numbs the senses particularly sight, sound and touch. When these senses fail, the stumbles and stutters kick in and swimming abilities may be altered.

IMPAIRED REACTION TIME

As a depressant, alcohol reduces the rate the brain processes information. Ordinary reactions simply take longer. On the water, a quick response is vital.

IMPAIRED JUDGEMENT

Alcohol distorts your perception of risk, and your own abilities. With less accurate information pouring into the brain, you're not as well equipped to make the right decisions.

For more information on any other matter relating to aquatic safety, contact:

Surf Life Saving Australia
02.9300.4000 or
slsa.com.au

Surf Life Saving NSW
(02) 9984 7188 or
surflifesaving.com.au

Surf Life Saving QLD
(07) 3846 8000 or
lifesaving.com.au

Life Saving Victoria
(03) 9676 6900 or
lifesavingvictoria.com.au

Surf Life Saving SA
(08) 8354 6900 or
surfrescue.com.au

Surf Life Saving WA
(08) 9243 9444 or
mybeach.com.au

Surf Life Saving TAS
(03) 6223 5555 or
slst.asn.au

Surf Life Saving NT
(08) 8985 6588 or
lifesavingnt.com.au

Or contact your local surf life saving club.

