



Alcohol is a drug – *TOO!*

**drug**  
**action week**<sup>®</sup>  
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## ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG USE IN SPORT: THE FACTS

Drugs and sport are both integral parts of our society. There are many instances in which the two might be combined - for performance enhancement, during after game celebration or commiseration, or to enhance enjoyment and relaxation.

Alcohol may enhance a person's interest in recreational sports, particularly aquatic leisure activities such as boating, fishing, and swimming. However, alcohol can increase risk of accident and death during sports, particularly where water is involved. Drinking while playing sports can also affect the body's ability to repair itself from any injury and can lead to dehydration, disturb sleep patterns and delay soft-tissue injury repair.

**Spectator sports** are often associated with drug-taking behaviour, which is emphasised by the alcohol industry's association with sport sponsorship. The Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice still allows alcohol advertisements "as an accompaniment to the live broadcast of a sporting event on weekends and public holidays" even though advertising alcohol is generally only allowed during adult classification times.

**Young People** involved in sporting or community activities are at a lower risk of early drug use, and involving at-risk youths in sporting or community groups can provide a protective factor. On the other hand, community sports clubs are often a place where young people are introduced to alcohol and inducted into a binge-drinking culture. Sporting clubs depend on alcohol sales for revenue, in some cases promoting excessive drinking and can provide inappropriate role models for young people. Problematic drinking is considered to be widespread within amateur sporting clubs in Australia.

**A culture** exists in Australia of after-game celebrations or commiserations, particularly within team sports. Until recently, the culture of drinking in sporting clubs has never really been challenged. Sporting clubs are now beginning to understand the duty of care they owe to their members and supporters. With better alcohol management and a focus on creating a culture to include young people and families, clubs can be much more viable, both financially and with a larger pool of members and volunteers to assist in the operation of the club.

**Performance enhancing drugs** are substances which are used by athletes to improve their physical ability. Athletes, both elite and amateur, try to increase their performance to gain a competitive advantage, sometimes to the extent where they are willing to risk their health and careers by taking banned substances.

Performance enhancing drugs include substances which can significantly improve a person's stamina (EPO, insulin, growth hormone), muscle growth (anabolic steroids), mask pain (narcotics), increase alertness and aggressiveness (stimulants like adrenaline), and increase oxygen in order to work the muscles harder (blood doping, plasma expanders).

In the last few years, the first internationally accepted standards for prohibited substances in sport have been developed by the World Anti-Doping Agency. For a substance to be prohibited, it must meet two of the following three criteria:

1. the substance is performance-enhancing
2. use of the substance poses health risks to the user, or
3. using the substance violates the spirit of the sport.

These criteria mean that non-performance enhancing drugs such as cannabis are banned while social drugs such as caffeine, which may produce a minimal performance-enhancing effect, are allowed.

## THE FIGURES ARE OUT

Alcohol contributed to around 21% of all drowning deaths in Australia over a 12 month period in 2000-2001. Nearly half of all drowning deaths occur in relation to aquatic water activity, and of these, alcohol contributed to almost a third.

The Australian Water Safety Council's 2004-2007 national water safety plan identified males aged 16-35 as one of the populations most at risk of drowning because of their risk taking behaviour, such as alcohol use.

Findings from studies examining the attitudes and behaviours in relation to alcohol use in community sporting clubs throughout Australia showed:

- 34% of respondents drank at their club two or more times per week
- 32% of males and 58% of females reported drinking at levels that placed them at risk of long-term harm
- 74% of respondents indicated they believed drinking was "an important tradition" at their club
- 84% of male Victorian Amateur Football Association club members reported spending up to three hours drinking at their club a week
- 48.6% drank up to four standard drinks at their club each visit and 40% consumed five or more each visit
- 60% of respondents socialised at their club three or more times per week; and
- those aged under 30 accounted for 95% of drinking that was high risk of short term harm (13 or more standard drinks).

Australians aged 20-29 are the most likely of all age groups to drink at levels that are risky or a high risk of harm in the short-term. This age group is also the population most likely to participate in sport or physical recreation (75% of 15-34-year-olds).

The average age of initiation for use of steroids for non-medical purposes in Australia has increased in recent years from 19 years of age in 1995 to 25 in 2004. In 2004, 0.3% of Australians aged 14 and over had ever used steroids for non-medical purposes and 58% of those sourced the drug from a friend or acquaintance.

A total of 3822 samples for doping testing of elite athletes were collected between 1 July 2006 and 1 February 2007 by the Australian Sports Anti-Doping Authority. Registered violations of anti-doping laws numbered 18 within that period.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Australian Water Safety Council  
[www.watersafety.com.au](http://www.watersafety.com.au)

Good Sports Program  
[www.goodsports.com.au](http://www.goodsports.com.au)

*Performance Enhancing Drugs –Human Growth Hormone Fact Sheet*  
[www.nationaldrugstrategy.gov.au/internet/drugstrategy/publishing.nsf/Content/fs-hgh](http://www.nationaldrugstrategy.gov.au/internet/drugstrategy/publishing.nsf/Content/fs-hgh)

*Australia's Anti Drugs in Sport Strategy*,  
Australian Government Department of Communications, Information and the Arts  
[www.dcita.gov.au/tough\\_on\\_drugs/content.htm](http://www.dcita.gov.au/tough_on_drugs/content.htm)

Australian Sports Anti-Doping Agency  
[www.asada.gov.au](http://www.asada.gov.au)

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare



Australian Government  
Department of Health and Ageing



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