

TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY AND ALCOHOL MISUSE

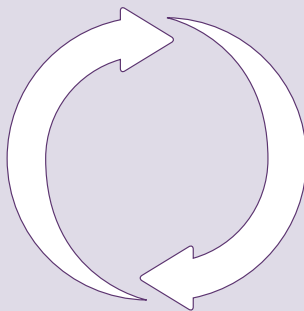
Traumatic Brain Injury Center of Excellence

Alcohol misuse is the excessive consumption of alcohol above recommended guidelines. It can impact productivity, operational readiness, and overall health in service members.

According to the [Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#), adults who choose to drink should do so in moderation. This means men should have no more than two drinks a day and women should have no more than one. The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports](#) that **one in six** U.S. adults binge drinks, with **25%** doing so at least weekly.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ALCOHOL MISUSE AND TBI

Heavy drinking increases the risk of sustaining a TBI



TBI increases the odds of alcohol misuse and can lead to other health concerns

At the time of head injury, **23–53%** of individuals exhibit alcohol intoxication. In the military, heavy alcohol consumption is **1.7** to **3.5** times more likely in service members with a TBI.^{1,2}

IMPACT OF ALCOHOL MISUSE AFTER TBI



Delayed recovery from TBI



Increased risk of reinjury and post-traumatic seizures



Difficulty returning to duty and daily activity



Impaired cognitive performance and mission readiness



Worsening mental health symptoms

RISK FACTORS FOR ALCOHOL MISUSE AFTER TBI

- Having a history of preinjury alcohol misuse
- Being a male
- Being between 20–30 years of age
- Having a mental health disorder, such as depression or posttraumatic stress disorder
- Having a mild TBI—or concussion—rather than a moderate or severe TBI

WHAT IS CONSIDERED A STANDARD DRINK?



12-ounce beer
(5% alcohol)



5-ounce wine
(12% alcohol)



1.5-ounce distilled spirits
(40% alcohol)

Learn more about drink equivalents from the [CDC](#) and [NIAA](#).

WHAT CAN I DO TO OPTIMIZE BRAIN HEALTH?

- Abstain from drinking after a TBI to lower the risk of poor health outcomes and prevent delayed return to duty.
- Understand the risk factors for alcohol misuse after TBI.
- Be aware of the impact of alcohol misuse.
- Stay up-to-date with [branch-specific alcohol and substance misuse policies](#).
- Know help is available. Find branch-specific resources and more from [Military OneSource](#).
- Learn more about alcohol misuse and alcohol use disorder from the [Real Warriors Campaign](#).

Talk to your health care provider if you have questions or concerns about your drinking. Ongoing excessive drinking can put you at risk for alcohol use disorder and other health problems, impacting readiness.

1. Rogan A, Patel V, Birdling J, et al. Alcohol and acute traumatic brain injury in the emergency department. *Emerg Med Australas*. 2021;33(4):718-727. doi:10.1111/1742-6723.13726
2. Miller SC, Baktash SH, Webb TS, et al. Risk for addiction-related disorders following mild traumatic brain injury in a large cohort of active-duty U.S. airmen. *Am J Psychiatry*. 2013;170(4):383-90. doi:10.1176/appi.ajp.2012.12010126

Do you have questions about this fact sheet? Feedback? Email dha.TBICoEinfo@health.mil.