

## Toasting the Holidays Safely

The holidays are usually a hectic and stressful time whether we're traveling to be with family, doing our last-minute shopping or entertaining at home. The holiday season is considered to be one of the most dangerous times of the year for alcohol-related accidents and death. More people drink during the holidays due to extra parties and other festivities. Many holiday drinkers don't drink often throughout the year, so they may underestimate their level of impairment and drive when they shouldn't. Problem drinkers and alcoholics love the holidays because there are more social opportunities to drink. Consequently, people with alcoholism drink and drive more frequently. Winter weather also causes hazardous road conditions which increases the likelihood of accidents, especially when coupled with impaired driving from excessive alcohol intake.



You can create happier and safer holidays by following these eight simple tips for consuming alcohol in moderation throughout the holiday season:

- 1. Just say no.** Just because alcohol is being served does not require that you drink it. There is no law stating that alcohol is an essential ingredient for holiday cheer. Don't feel obligated to drink just because your host offers — it's not rude to choose a non-alcoholic beverage instead.
- 2. Offer guests a choice.** Serve nonalcoholic drinks like soda, fruit juices or water in addition to alcohol. Put the nonalcoholic beverages out in an easily accessible place to make people feel more comfortable with choosing them.
- 3. Never pressure anyone to drink.** The use of alcohol is a personal choice.
- 4. Serve snacks so guests are not drinking on an empty stomach.** Raw vegetables, meat or cheese dishes, whole grain crackers and dips are good foods to serve as they are digested slowly and decrease the rate of alcohol absorption.
- 5. Choose a designated driver before going out to a party.** If you or your friends are planning to go out to a party and drink alcohol, decide in advance who will be the designated driver.
- 6. Limit overall alcohol consumption.** If you plan to drink, decide ahead of time how many drinks you will have and stick to it. Space your drinks by alternating them with a glass of water, soda, coffee or some other nonalcoholic choice.
- 7. Be prepared to drive anyone home or call a cab for anyone who has had too much to drink.** You may also consider offering your couch or spare bed for an impaired drinker.
- 8. Remember that alcohol is a complement, not the purpose.**

Sometimes we forget the real reason for the holiday celebration and view it as an opportunity to drink. The main purpose of a party is to have fun and socialize with people you know. Drinking is always an option, and it should be done responsibly. If you find yourself going overboard, find a friend or loved one, and explain you'd like to go home.

You can make your holidays fun, relaxing and peaceful as long as you remember to drink in moderation, and encourage your loved ones to do the same. Don't become another drunk driving statistic, and keep in mind the real reasons people celebrate at this time of the year. If you would like more information on assessing your drinking pattern or resources for limiting alcohol intake, go to [www.rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/](http://www.rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/) for more information.