

## WHY BINGE HOLIDAY DRINKING IS ANYTHING BUT MERRY



[www.beachway.com](http://www.beachway.com)

'Tis the season to eat, drink and be merry. Some of us, however, take those festive suggestions to dangerous lengths and end up binge drinking. While one night of imbibing multiple drinks may only leave you with a hangover, using the holidays as an excuse to drink abusively from Thanksgiving to New Year's Eve can lead to alcoholism and other negative brain/body effects.

### **Why do people drink too much during the holidays?**

**“A lot of traditions at this time of year involve alcohol,”** says **Carrie Carlton LCSW at Beachway Therapy in Boynton Beach, Florida.** “You’re with friends and family who you may not see all the time, and you want to have a good time, and so you celebrate with a few

drinks. This isn't harmful as long as you're aware of your limits." Unfortunately, that can be more difficult when you're not used to drinking a lot, as well as when you're guzzling seasonal cocktails that you're unaccustomed to.

### **What is binge drinking?**

Binge drinking is typically defined as more than 5 drinks for men and 4 drinks for women within a short span of time, usually 2 hours. The safest course of action, if you must imbibe, is to pace yourself and space out your drinks to give your liver time to break down the alcohol.

### **What is "holiday heart syndrome"?**

Holiday heart syndrome is a term for a reason. The name was coined in 1978 after doctors in New Jersey started noticing patients showing up to emergency rooms with arrhythmias after bouts of heavy drinking, usually during weekends or holidays. These patients were apparently healthy with no history of heart problems or other risk factors. The most common arrhythmia seen with holiday heart syndrome is atrial fibrillation, a condition that increases the chance of stroke and often requires people to be on lifelong blood thinners. **Dr. Duy Nguyen is a psychiatrist at Beachway.** He explains that, "Fortunately, holiday heart syndrome can resolve if the drinking stops. Despite the widely held belief that alcohol is good for your heart, heavy drinking at a holiday party may be enough to cause an arrhythmia and land you in the hospital."

### **The risk of alcohol poisoning**

Alcohol poisoning is more common than people realize. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention an average of six people a day die from alcohol poisoning and three quarters of them are between the ages of 35-64. Most of them are men.

Dr. Nguyen explains that, “Alcohol is a central nervous system depressant, so apart from the nausea and vomiting that comes with over drinking, alcohol can slow your breathing, drop your core body temperature and cause seizures. How much alcohol it takes to put your life at risk depends, to a large extent, on your height, weight, when your last meal was and a number of other factors, so each person is different.”

### **Immune System:**

Drinking too much can weaken your immune system. Chronic drinkers are more liable to contract diseases like pneumonia and tuberculosis than people who do not drink too much. Drinking a lot on a single occasion can slow your body’s ability to ward off infections.

### **Heart:**

Alcohol can damage the heart, even just drinking too much on one occasion, causing the following problems:

High blood pressure

Stroke

Arrhythmias – Irregular heart beat

Cardiomyopathy – Stretching and drooping of heart muscle

### **Liver:**

Drinking takes a heavy toll on the liver and can lead to a variety of problems including:

Liver failure (drinking too much over time)

Steatosis, or fatty liver

Fibrosis

Cirrhosis

Alcoholic hepatitis

## **Cancer:**

Drinking too much alcohol can increase your risk of developing certain cancers, including:

Mouth

Esophagus

Throat

Liver

Breast

**To enjoy a safe holiday celebration, consider these tips:**

**Abstain.** You do not need alcohol to be the life of the party.

**Pace yourself.** Avoid binge-drinking. Spread out the consumption of your drinks, consider one drink an hour.

**Avoid drinks with unknown alcohol content** or mixing alcohol with energy drinks. Caffeine in energy drinks or sodas can mask the effects of alcohol, causing people to drink more alcohol than intended/are aware.

**Substitute alcoholic drinks for non-alcoholic drinks.** Consider drinking water between each alcoholic beverage to slow your pace and dilute the alcohol in your bloodstream.

**Don't forget to eat food.** Starch-heavy foods soak up the alcohol and will mitigate the effects of alcohol on your system.

**Secure a designated driver.** Keep in mind that a designated driver stays 100 percent sober - not the person who drank the least or the least.

**About Beachway Therapy Center** <http://www.beachway.com>

Beachway provides a continuum of care, from PHP (Partial Hospitalization Program) to Outpatient services. The facility offers a fully individualized treatment plan that meets the clinical and medical needs of each client usually lasting

between 30 and 90 days. Beachway provides an extremely low client to therapist ratio and under high-level professional supervision, clients can begin to recover in a safe, residential-like environment. CBT (cognitive behavioral therapy) motivational interviewing, addiction counseling, 12-Step orientation, DBT (dialectical behavioral therapy,) trauma-informed practices and a wide variety of supportive group therapies are offered.