

*Importance
Alcohol - Phys Effect*

WHY ALCOHOLIC LIQUORS ARE HARMFUL

By CORA FRANCES STODDARD

There are several helpful approaches to the discussion of this subject with young people with a view to reaching a decision as to personal habits.

1. The question may be approached through the motive of keeping fit. Every boy understands that in terms of sport. He knows what he expects of himself if he is trying to "make" or to stay on the team, or of the team if he is but a cheering outsider. Fitness for life's work and responsibilities is even more important. It was this that the great surgeon, Dr. Charles Mayo, had in mind when he said to a convention of boys: "You can get along with a wooden leg but you can't get along with a wooden head. It is the brain that counts. But in order that your brain may be kept clear, you must keep your body fit and well. That can not be done if you drink liquor."

How alcohol acts on the brain, "like sand in the engine" as Edison once said, is profitable for discussion through modern scientific facts. Indeed it may be said to be nearly the fundamental issue, because practically all effects of alcohol on the individual in his activities and in his relations to other people come back to the effect on the brain and nerves.

2. Approach can be made through youthful eagerness to be thought "up-to-date." The youth moving in this mental realm should also be acquainted with the story of modern scientific study of alcohol and its results, and he should be helped to see that these results are "up-to-date" and do not encourage continuance

of hoary drinking customs cradled long centuries ago when this later knowledge was not available. He may be shown the precedent of the romance of modern progressive conquest of disease as the new knowledge, gained in the past sixty years about germs and their transmission, when acted upon, has led to new practices in hygiene and sanitation with the reward of increasing freedom from these diseases. No up-to-date person to-day follows early Victorian unhygienic usages antedating knowledge of germ causes of disease. Similarly, the up-to-date person knowing the modern facts about alcohol will order his life by these facts and not by erroneous notions descended from bygone generations.

3. There is the challenge of the modern world to youth. High-powered machines will master man unless man's clear brain keeps firm mastery over them. Swift transportation, the airship, the almost human machine that by a thousand operations turns out a finished product from crude material—all these that no other age knew challenge youth's powers of control.

Social relations of increasing complexity challenge youth. The home is not going to be patient much longer with the impaired control of speech or act due to the alcohol used by the drinking parent. Business does not want the drinker in whom even slight slowing of nerve messages may be responsible for an accident to the drinker himself or to his fellow employees. The future employer should know that the narcotic effect of alcohol on nerve control even before the drunkenness stage is reached may be costly in accident damages or, through fingers made even a little clumsy, may spoil materials, bungle handiwork, and reduce production.

Both future employers and employees should know that there is less and less place in business for the person, man or woman, in whom even the moderate use of alcohol may impair the sense of responsibility, loosen reticence in confidential affairs, lessen tact and capability in dealing with business associates, in handling employees, or in approaching employers in matters requiring adjustment.

Great world tasks challenge youth, but they call in the twentieth century for clear-brained men and women. Modern science teaches that there always is a risk that even the moderate drinker may not have his brain or nervous system at its best when his best is required, or may often act on a lower level of efficiency than that of which he is capable. "Merely to be below par," says Professor Irving Fisher, "is almost as disgusting as drunkenness to a bright modern man."

4. What are some of the facts important for a youth to know as he faces these challenges? He should know that drunkenness is no longer the measure of the injury done by alcohol. No one defends drunkenness any more; its results are obviously opposed to the welfare of the drinker himself and of those with whom he comes in contact. Those who have not seen the open saloon and the drunkenness that accompanied it should know how disgusting, degrading, and despairing the latter was just a few years ago.

The message of modern science to modern youth is not about drunkenness. It deals with those effects of alcohol that precede drunkenness or that result from quantities of alcohol too small to cause drunkenness. This generation, if given the up-to-date facts, will not go on into adult life believing that "it doesn't do any harm to drink as long as you don't get

drunk." It will know that alcohol from first to last acts as a narcotic on the brain and nerve cells as it increases resistance to the passage of nerve impulses from cell to cell. The narcotic effect can be seen in the drunken stupor, in the feet that go unsteadily because alcohol has dulled the nerves that control the muscles involved. But its earliest effect on the brain dulls the high powers of self-control and of judging actions correctly. Even when the drinker has taken so little alcohol that it does not appear to cripple him in work to which he is accustomed, it tends to blunt mental keenness so that he may not judge correctly what he is doing; he may think he is brave when he is only rash; he may think he is doing better work, that his "beer peps him up," when actually tests may show that he is doing poorer work. It trips him into disregard of rules of conduct he would prefer to observe, or loosens his tongue on matters about which he would keep silent, or betrays him into uncontrolled argument or hasty word or act that normally he would avoid.

Alcohol in quantities not large enough to cause drunkenness has also been demonstrated to cause slower work, reduced precision and skill, dullness of sense perception, diminished attention, and lowered productivity.

Finally, it is to the higher brain levels that we look for finer human development. Just here science tells us that alcohol does its earliest work. Can we afford to risk dulling, even temporarily, the brain cells by which we command ourselves, shape our environments and the life of society? This is the question modern science will help youth to answer.

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