

ONE  
DRINK  
CAN  
BE  
TOO  
MANY



## Even one drink can be too many

Meet Ethan and Ashley, recent participants in an experiment simulating how alcohol affects your ability to drive. The experiment gave them a new perspective on how easily alcohol — even one drink — affected their driving abilities. You'll see what led them to decide not to drink and drive — the choice responsible individuals make.

Ethan is a classic “jock” — football, weightlifting, track, and swimming occupy much of his time. At 200 pounds of mostly muscle, he’s pretty confident of his ability to control any situation.



And then there’s Ashley, Ethan's petite, 120-pound girlfriend. She may lack size, but she makes up for it in confidence. Her friends describe her as someone who is “very together.”

Together, Ethan and Ashley are one of those couples you expect to succeed in anything they do.

## Taking the challenge ...

Representatives from the local Highway Patrol were on campus recruiting individuals for the Annual Sobriety Driving Challenge. For several years, the Patrol had partnered with the university in an effort to create awareness of the dangers of driving after drinking alcohol. The purpose was to show how quickly and to what degree alcohol impairs judgment and reflexes, and to demonstrate how long it takes the body to eliminate alcohol.

Volunteers were asked to participate in three activities:

- 1 Consumption of alcohol
- 2 Roadside field sobriety test
- 3 Driving under controlled conditions

Ashley, always looking to help a good cause, talked Ethan into signing up. Ethan was a little less enthusiastic, but the thought of free beer piqued his interest.

Knock back a few drinks and get behind the wheel? Ethan thought, “No problem.” He knows he can drink his weight in beer and still ace the driving test. Nothing fazes him. Ashley, on the other hand ... well, this should be very interesting.

## Highway Patrol Training Center

8:30 a.m.

### Controlled condition driving – sober

It was a sunny Saturday morning when Ethan, Ashley and six others met at the Patrol Training Center to begin the Annual Sobriety Driving Challenge. Officer Blake addressed the group and verified that all participants had not consumed any food that morning.

Before alcohol consumption began, participants were asked to perform the controlled driving test under sober conditions. The results would later be compared to the participants’ driving performance under impaired conditions.

9:00 a.m.

### Alcohol consumption

Having a blood-alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.08 percent means you are legally intoxicated in all states. After two beers, Ethan performed a breath alcohol test. He was still very cocky about his drinking prowess, as he only registered a 0.03 percent (far from being legally intoxicated). Ashley also took the breath alcohol test after consuming two glasses of wine. Her results were

slightly higher — registering 0.05 percent. Like Ethan, Ashley was still under the legal limit.

Over the next 30 minutes, Ethan downed two more beers. He felt completely relaxed and rather euphoric. His face was flushed and he couldn't shut up. Keeping pace, Ashley finished drinking two more glasses of wine for a total of four during the course of the consumption period. Usually reserved in personality, Ashley became lively, animated and extremely talkative.

At this point, all of the volunteers chattered non-stop, talked loudly, and laughed — viewing the world through an alcohol-induced haze.

### 10:30 a.m. Standardized Field Sobriety Testing

With the alcohol consumption portion complete, all participants were now ready to begin the Standardized Field Sobriety Testing. Officer Blake informed the group about the three tests that would be conducted:

- 1 Nine-step walk and turn
- 2 30-second leg lift
- 3 Horizontal gaze nystagmus (pen/eye test)

These roadside tests are commonly used to help law enforcement officers make decisions about which drivers to investigate further. Participants were informed that breath alcohol tests would also be performed and that only individuals with a BAC of 0.08 percent or below would be allowed to continue on to the final controlled condition driving test.

Ethan was first up to attempt the 30-second leg lift. He wobbled from the start and almost fell over several times before the count reached 30. In a real roadside situation, Ethan's performance on the test would have

#### DID YOU KNOW?

A BAC of 0.08 percent means that the body has a ratio of 8 drops of alcohol for every 10,000 drops of blood.

merited an invitation to take a breath alcohol test. His breath test revealed that his BAC was 0.062 percent; below 0.08 percent, but not far from it.



Next, Ashley began the nine-step walk and turn test. In just a few steps, Ashley lost her balance, stepped off the line and asked Officer Blake to start over. The reason for Ashley's poor performance soon became clear. The results of her breath alcohol test showed that, after four glasses of wine, Ashley had a 0.092 percent BAC. Based on the breath alcohol test, Ashley was informed that she would not be permitted to continue to the driving test. Not to be outdone, she pleaded with Officer Blake to allow her to "sober up" before the driving test so that she could drive.



The officer proposed a compromise: Ashley was granted 20 minutes to prepare for a follow-up breath alcohol test. If she could register at 0.08 percent or below, he would permit her to

participate in the controlled condition driving test. Officer Blake chuckled as he observed Ashley quickly drinking coffee, eating a sandwich and splashing cold water on her face, all in an attempt to lower her BAC. As 11:00 a.m. and the driving test approached, Ashley found herself a bundle of nerves with a full stomach, but still intoxicated. She still felt that something must have worked; she had to at least be under 0.08 percent. But, once again, Officer Blake administered the breath alcohol test and this time it read 0.091 percent. Yes, it had changed, but just slightly. Ashley would now have to sit and wait because, as the officer explained, "Time is the only factor when it comes to sobering up."

**11:30 a.m.**

### **Controlled condition driving — impaired**

When called for his turn behind the wheel, Ethan appeared overconfident and cocky. The first indication that Ethan was not in control was his confusion over



Officer Blake's instructions. Asked to enter the course at 30 mph, Ethan sped into the first corner at 45 mph, knocking over several traffic cones. Next was the parallel parking exercise where drivers would pull to the left or right of a flag and then back carefully into a parking space marked by cones. Ethan again backed too quickly and hit one of the rear cones, then caught a front cone as he pulled forward into the space. The bad news: the cones represented cars — parked and moving — and pedestrians. Ethan failed, along with all of the remaining participants.

### **Drinking and driving don't mix ...**

Ethan, Ashley and the other test subjects clearly demonstrated that drinking and driving is a dangerous combination. Seven out of eight drivers tested were below the legal limit and still were substantially impaired while driving. Because of the safety policies in place, no one was injured during these controlled tests. In real life, impaired driving often leads to tragic consequences. Remember, the greater your BAC, the greater your risk of being injured or killed in a crash.

### **None for the road ...**

So, what awaits Ethan and his buddies if they are stopped for impaired driving? All 50 states have lowered the legal blood alcohol concentration (BAC) limit from 0.10 to 0.08 percent for adults. However, in most states drivers can be convicted of impaired driving because of alcohol-related behavioral changes, which can occur at BACs well below 0.08. Additionally, all

states have a type of "zero tolerance" law that prohibits drivers under the age of 21 from having alcohol in their blood system.

Most states and the District of Columbia have passed Administrative License Revocation (ALR) and other laws that allow the arresting officer to take the license of a driver who either fails or refuses to take a breath or blood alcohol test.

Penalties for drinking and driving have increased, and offenders face:

- Mandatory jail time
- Community service
- Fines
- Alcohol education programs
- Loss of license
- Other penalties

Plus, they may be ineligible for a restricted license that would enable them to drive only to and from work. Additional costs associated with their offense could include large fees for acquiring the services of an attorney.

### **Don't learn the hard way...**

Ethan and Ashley learned a lot from their experience. They now realize that drinking and driving is a serious problem that can result in injury, death, property damage, and emotional pain. The choice to use alcohol is a legal right granted to Ethan, Ashley and other adults 21 years of age and over. It's what they do with this choice that makes the difference.

Both learned that

- Driving ability can be negatively affected at BACs well below 0.08 percent
- Body weight, drink size, beverage type and gender can all affect one's BAC
- Time is the only factor in the elimination of alcohol from the body
- The best approach is to avoid being in a position to drive after consuming alcohol.

**Make the right choice when it comes to drinking and driving. Just don't do it.  
Find a safe way home.**

## Remember ...

- The first ability affected by alcohol is judgment/decision-making.
- Some of the factors that affect BAC include:
  - Gender
  - Body weight
  - Size and strength of beverage.
- Time is the only factor in the elimination of alcohol from the body.
- Drivers can be convicted of impaired driving at blood alcohol levels well below 0.08 percent.
- It's simple — don't drive after drinking. Before you drink, make sure you have a safe way home.



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