



## **Binge Drinking: How Much Is Too Much?**

By Dr. Linda Hancock

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled “All Psyched Up” for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of “Life is An Adventure...every step of the way” and “Open for Business Success” is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email [office@drlindahancock.com](mailto:office@drlindahancock.com)

### **Published**

July 17th, 2012

There has been a lot of media coverage lately about the changes recently made regarding Alberta's drinking and driving laws. The penalties are not only stiffer but the .08 blood alcohol content that was used in the past to define "intoxicated" is being lowered to .05.

But what the professionals are concerned about lately is not the term "intoxicated" but the term "impaired". You see these are two very different terms that need to be understood clearly.

"Intoxicated" is a legal term that is used in the legal system. "Impaired" is a more general term that is used in health arenas. You see, a person can be just as or more dangerous when they are impaired than when they are intoxicated.

Imagine that you had half a dozen beer last night. You would likely blow over .08. As the evening wore on, if you quit drinking at that point your blood alcohol content would likely go down but that doesn't mean that you are healthy and safe. There are still a number of factors that would put you and others at risk.

Your reaction time is slowed. You likely haven't eaten properly, and your electrolytes are out of balance. By the time you get up early to go to work, you will likely not be feeling your best.

When I ask clients to describe the word "binge" I get a variety of answers. Some think that a binge is when you drink for days and can't remember what happened during at least part of the time. Others describe a situation where a person is passed out in a back alley with a bottle that is shoved into a brown paper bag.

You will likely be surprised that the standard definition for a "binge" in North America is three drinks for a man and two for a woman. That doesn't seem like very much, especially if you have a peer group that is used to drinking far more than that on a regular basis.

But let's get real for a minute. If your surgeon had more than three drinks just before entering the operating room for a procedure on your child, would you be comfortable? Would you want the Family Court judge who is dealing with your divorce and custody issues to make a ruling right after attending a cocktail party? How many drinks do you think a pilot should be allowed before take-off?

Well, when you get into your car, are you comfortable thinking that there are others who are driving who have had three or more drinks?

Intoxicated, impaired or on a binge - it really doesn't matter what term you use - they are all high risk!