Ah, yes. Turning 21. It’s an exciting age of feeling like an adult that often happens during college. Though most students have experienced alcohol in some way when or before arriving to a college campus, reaching the age to drink is considered a rite of passage by many as they’re emerging adults. It’s also the most celebrated birthday in the United States as people can buy alcohol and legally drink. Drinking is the first activity brought to mind. The question though is, how to celebrate? Gather everyone you know and throw a big party? Or treat yourself to a bar in the local area? Binge drinking is the most common activity. It’s a pattern of drinking where people are having more than the limit of 4 to 5 drinks within a two-hour period which is considered a heavy amount. The increased consumption stems from the increased availability. No longer is alcohol considered forbidden when turning 21.

Research from *College Health* has found 1 in 3 college students increase their alcohol use through their college years and they accept the adult-like role and possibilities open up to drink.

Hey, thanks for tuning into another episode of, “In the Mix,” through the Alcohol and Other Drugs Services here at Grand Valley. As always, I’m Zachary Plisko, your host for season 2, episode 3. We’ll discuss various topics of alcohol and other drugs within the college environment. I’m here to inform listeners to be safe, be responsible and be smart if they use substances. Today’s episode we’ll cover, turning the adult age of 21. Topics we’ll cover includes, expectations of drinking, out your limits and making safe choices.

First, we’ll break down how alcohol works and the expectations of drinking.

Everyone knows what alcohol is, whether it’s beer, wine, whiskey, cocktails and much more. It’s considered a drug in which a drink is fermented and when consumed, it changes how the brain sends and receives messages to the rest of the body. Once consumed, it’s rapidly absorbed through a lining in your stomach then into the bloodstream and moves throughout all parts of the body by spreading to different tissues.

After 20 minutes of consuming alcohol, the liver breaks down most of the alcohol at an average of one drink an hour though the amount of alcohol in a body varies. It depends on how much is drunk and the strength of the alcohol. Factors include body type, age, gender and how well the liver works to break down the alcohol.

As for the brain being affected by alcohol, it changes the communication pathways and how the brain processes information. There are several stages of alcohol intoxication according to *Northwestern Medicine*.

1. Subliminal Intoxication: This is the first stage of alcohol intoxication that happens after about one drink. Though it feels like you haven’t been drinking, reaction time, behavior and judgement may be slightly altered (*Northwestern Medicine*)
2. Euphoria: Early stages of drinking, your brain releases more dopamine. It’s a chemical linked with pleasure. During euphoria, you may feel more confident and relaxed, but reasoning and memory could be impaired. This stage is also known as, “tipsy”.
3. Excitement: At this point, you’ll be considered legally intoxicated with about four to five drinks consumed. This stage you experience blurred vision, slurred speech and hearing and lack of concentration. You must be careful if you drink more because nausea and vomiting can occur.
4. Confusion: Also known as “black out” where you’ll be disoriented and coordination is lost. As a result, you’ll probably need help walking or standing and you might experience loss of consciousness or short-term memory loss. Your pain tolerance may decrease which can increase risk of injury. Often, binge drinking occurs where more than 4 to 5 drinks are consumed.
5. Stupor: Here, you must be careful as signs point towards alcohol poisoning. All mental, physical and sensory functions are impaired with a chance of passing out and high injury risk.
6. Alcohol Poisoning: Is the most serious consequence of drinking excessive amounts of alcohol. Drinking too much can affect breathing, heart rate, body temperature and gag reflex. You’ll want to call emergency services to assist the issue.

After breaking down the stages of intoxication, let’s share the different words or lettering on bottles or menus at restaurants to prevent excessive drinking.

To start, ABV is known as alcohol by volume. It’s used to measure the strength of an alcoholic drink. Also, it shows the amount of ethanol/alcohol is in a container or bottle and is shown as a percentage of the overall volume in a drink. An example of ABV is a bottle of whiskey is 33%, meaning it’s high in alcohol volume.

The United States uses the proof system. Again, it’s another way to measure the ethanol/alcohol content in a bottle or container, however, it’s measured by doubling the alcohol percentage. It’s typically used to measure hard liquor to understand the strength of a drink. If we take the ABV percentage from the whiskey bottle of 33% and double it, we get 66 proof.

Giving a brief understanding of ABV and proof, there’s many types of alcoholic drinks that college students are familiar with.

We’ll do a brief overview of the most common types of alcoholic drinks. To start, wine is usually made up of fermented grape juice, though many other fruits work. A glass of wine is about 5 fluid ounces and has about 12% alcohol content.

Beer is an alcoholic drink made from yeast-fermented malt that’s often found in a 12-fluid ounce can or bottle and has about 5% of alcohol content.

An IPA (India Pale Ale) is a hoppy style of beer that has higher alcohol content than craft beer. Their characteristics are largely hops, a green-cone shaped flower, herbal, citrus or fruity flavor and known to be bitter.

Distilled Spirits are alcoholic beverages that are distilled from grains, fruits and other fermented ingredients found in gin, rum, tequila, vodka, whiskey and more. Spirits are known to be the most concentrated form of alcohol and are given in small amounts called “shots” which is typically a tiny glass of 1.5 fluid ounces, but has around 40% of alcohol content.

Cocktails are a mixture of several spirit drinks and other ingredients such as juice, lemonade or fruits. Alcohol content varies, it depends on what’s ordered.

Since cocktails differ in ingredients and alcohol content, we’ll break down two common drinks found at bars.

A Moscow Mule. This common cocktail typically consists of one and a half ounces of vodka, four ounces of ginger beer and a sixth ounce of lemon juice. Usually its alcohol content is 11% ABV or 22 proof, which is equivalent to a glass of wine.

Another example is a classic margarita. This drink usually contains an ounce and half of tequila, one ounce of lemon juice, crushed ice and possible coarse salt. A margarita is commonly twelve ounces and 4.4% ABV.

Again, ingredients vary, but a couple example drinks can help what ingredients and how much alcohol are used.

There are over 280 bars in the Grand Rapids area. If going to one, be sure to have your ID on you at all times. It’s almost a guarantee to be checked at the entrance of a bar and even when seated the bartender may ask to see it. If you just turned 21, you might still have the vertical ID as the new license is still being sent. Be sure that you went to the Secretary of State's Office and had a temporary license stapled to your old ID to prove you’re 21. Without the temporary license, businesses can deny you drinks.

All bars have signature drinks, usually there’s a menu with the listed ingredients and sometimes the alcohol content. If not, don’t be shy to ask the bartender the ABV or the drink to stay within your limits.

A few choices to help stay safe at a bar. Knowing your transportation or way to get to the bar and back to your housing is important. Have a friend be the designated driver or use Uber or Lyft to get back.

Being a first timer to a bar, it’s okay to go light. One drink can be plenty, so you’re still aware and enjoy the rest of your night.

Be sure to drink water all throughout the night. Plenty of water and staying hydrated can help filter alcohol out of the system so your symptoms of drinking aren't as intense.

Mixing drinks can be dangerous, as you can lose track of how many standard drinks you’ve had. Also, it could increase the rate of alcohol you’ve had if you drink a lower alcohol content drink then jump to a mixed drink that can have way high alcohol content.

If someone hands you a glass, don’t drink it. Unless it’s from a waiter, waitress or bartender, accepting a drink from other individuals can be dangerous because you don’t know what’s in the drink alcohol content wise or if the person altered the drink beforehand. Also, don’t leave your drink unattended. Always have an eye on it or in hand at all times.

Last tip. If you’re celebrating your birthday, many people may want to buy you drinks as a small token of congratulations. It’s okay to say no. If you feel pressured, episode one of, “In the Mix” highlights strategies to combat peer pressure.

If you had a lot of alcohol, you might experience a hangover. It happens when withdrawing from heavy alcohol consumption. Usually, symptoms include fatigue, weakness, nausea, muscle aches, and irritability. The liver is working it’s best to break down the alcohol from a substance to water and carbon dioxide. The rest is excreted through the lungs, kidneys, and sweat. Let’s go over some ways to cure a hangover according to the *Alcohol Rehab Help*.

1. Taking a cold shower is a way to wake yourself up. It makes you feel more alert, though it won’t reverse alcoholic effects.
2. Drinking coffee is another way to become more alert. Again, it doesn’t reverse alcoholic effects as it’s a myth that you’ll sober up quicker, but more awareness helps individuals understand they’re drunk and to sober up. Also, coffee is a diuretic which can cause you to become dehydrated, so be sure to drink lots of water as the next tip says.
3. Drinking lots of water and staying hydrated helps flush out the toxins from the body after consuming alcohol.
4. Eating specific foods helps too. Bland foods like bread or crackers keep the stomach at ease. Fruits such as bananas can help replenish a body’s potassium level after a night of drinking. They also contain fiber and sugar which promotes the digestive system and energy needed.
5. Sleep is known to be the most effective way to sober up. Sleep enables rest and recovery and also gets alcohol out of the system. Even small naps help. Sleeping gives the liver a chance to metabolize the alcohol consumed.

Overall, it’s key to help the body recover by nutrition, hydration and rest. Get a good night of rest and a healthy meal to speed up the recovery from excessive alcohol consumption.

AOD Services provides help with understanding and educating students further about alcohol.

For students who are looking to gain more information on alcohol, AOD services has an Alcohol Education Workshop. It’s about a two-hour workshop that’s designed for students who have personal concerns with alcohol and looking for more information. Also, it focuses on how to be responsible, safe and more aware of alcohol. The education it provides relates to alcohol awareness, health and safety issues with binge drinking and state laws on alcohol use. The workshop is open to enrolled students

Students who are concerned about alcohol use, there’s an Alcohol ECheckup. It’s an online assessment for individuals that asks several questions about your relationship with alcohol. The purpose is to give information that’s specific to you and live the healthiest life you can. Everyone is different when it comes to alcohol use as there’s not a “one-size-fits-all” resolution, nor is the goal to force change on students. Instead, the goal is to educate students to be safe, responsible and smart with choices around alcohol.

If students find themselves drinking a lot, AOD services provide Recovery Meetings. It’s a 12-step program for individuals who share their experience, strength and hope with each other to solve common issues and help others recover from an alcohol problem.

Lastly, the Knowledge Support Series. The AOD office holds a series of topics related to substance abuse, impacts and issues.

Join the variety of topics via Zoom to get more information and ask questions about each topic. Presentations last about 40 to 50 minutes and are open to students, faculty, staff, and the community.

Head to gvsu.edu/aod/aod-services for more information about any of the services that were shared.

That’s the end of episode 3 of, “In the Mix”. Remember, enjoy your 21st birthday, but be sure to know what you’re drinking and understand your limits are the biggest takeaways of today’s episode. Until next time, I’m Zachary Plisko.