

Over 21 is not the answer

[Health & Medicine](#), [Alcoholism](#)



Over 21 is Not the Answer " When you are 18 you are judged mature enough to vote, hold public office, serve on juries, serve in the military, fly airplanes, sign contracts and so on. Why is drinking a beer an act of greater responsibility and maturity than flying an airplane or serving your country at war? " (NYRA, 2005). The issue of the drinking age in the United States has been an ongoing battle for many decades. Drinking ages varied by each state up until the 1980's when the federal government threatened to take away a percentage of state's federal highway fund (Keen, 2008). Ever since this threat, all states have adopted the national drinking age of 21. They are determined to keep this the legal drinking age even though many foreign countries are having success with lower drinking ages. There are many arguments for and against lowering the drinking age, but I believe there are more compelling arguments toward lowering the age to 18 or 19. " The American Medical Association links drinking to 1, 400 deaths, 500, 000 injuries and 70, 000 sexual assault cases on campuses every year" (USA Today, 2007). This links to my first point that the current drinking age is not solving anything. There are still many problems created by drinking. This is evident in college especially. It is well known that the majority of college students drink, regardless if they are of legal age or not. It has the " forbidden fruit" appeal to a lot of students. This means that the illegal tag placed on alcohol in turn makes kids want to try it and drink. Due to the fact that it is illegal, it causes underage drinkers to binge drink. By doing this they consume large amounts of alcohol. This leads to dangerous behavior and further problems. This is what leads to the statistic mentioned in the beginning of the paragraph. When underage people drink, they

normally drink in an uncontrolled environment with no supervision. This scenario is on its way to problems from the beginning. If something were to go wrong they would fear legal or parental consequences. I asked fifteen students if they would call their parents if they were drinking and were in trouble. Twelve students said they would not contact their parents because they would be afraid, and one said her parents let her drink, so she would not be worried. This shows that the thought of this could scare them away from calling the proper authorities for help. For an example, if kids were at a party and they were drinking, they might drive home in order to get home in time for their parents curfew. They might drive home drunk so they would not get in trouble. Imagine then if the drinking age was lower, then they could tell their parents the situation. Maybe their parents would let them stay the night at the place where the party is, or maybe they would offer to pick them up. Professor Ruth Engs says, "When faced with the opportunity to drink, underage drinkers tend to drink irresponsibly as a badge of rebellion against authority" (Engs, 2000). Alcohol is not always accessible to people under 21, so when they get the chance to drink, they drink to get drunk, and they do not really think through the consequences. They end up driving and doing harmful things to themselves as a result. "Dartmouth College, with 4,400 undergraduates, admits on average about 200 alcohol emergencies a year to their campus health center. Middlebury, with 2,300 students, averages about 100. McGill University - located in Montreal where the drinking age is 18 - with 20,000 undergrads reported only 12 emergencies in the 2002-03 academic year" (Guenther et al, 2006). This is living evidence that in a society where drinking starts earlier there are

fewer emergencies and problems stemming from alcohol use. A lower age would get rid of the forbidden appeal and binge drinking would not be as common as it is now. There is evidence that changing the legal age to 21 has made binge drinking worse than it was when it was 18. f This statistic is pretty substantial, because this shows that binge drinking in some cases is increasing extremely. This problem shows people do not learn to drink correctly or safely with the current drinking age. A 20 percent increase in non-college women shows that people of age are still dangerously drinking. In 2008, over 120 college presidents came together to make a proposal for lowering the drinking age to 18. “ This, they suggested, would take colleges out of the untenable position of pretending that students under 21 are not drinking, and it would turn drinking into a public activity. College officials could then have a better chance of monitoring the drinking and of making moderate drinking the norm" (Christian Century, 2008). College presidents are more aware the current underage drinking situation than any government officials because they are in an environment that increases the chances of under aged drinking. They are involved with kids who face situations where drinking, despite age, is the norm. The presidents know that the law does not deter college students from drinking, so they want a way to be able to make it safe as possible. They have come to the realization that they cannot stop it, so they just want to be able to control it. They also want to be able to better educate students in alcohol abuse. College freshman are just thrown into a new environment, where drinking is dominant, and are expected to be able to make wise decisions. This is not possible with the drinking age at 21. If the drinking age was 18; when

people turn 18 in high school, their parents could “develop” their drinking knowledge. The United States of America has the highest minimum drinking age in the world. The United States is one of four countries with a legal age of 21 (NYRA, 2005). A very large majority of European countries have drinking ages of 18 or lower. These countries have had much more success in limiting alcohol abuse and fatalities due to alcohol. European kids grow up in an environment that has alcohol introduced to them at earlier ages. They learn valuable lessons about alcohol earlier in their lives so as they grow older they control their consumption of alcohol. Also because it is a part of their everyday lives, it loses its forbidden appeal. As a result, they are less likely to binge drink and cause harm to themselves. They are accustomed to alcohol so they consume in moderation and they drink responsibly. The opposition may say that there are surveys saying European teens binge just as much as Americans, but how they consume is not everything. They have fewer alcohol related accidents and deaths. Europeans have much lower DUI rates than Americans do. They also have much fewer fatal crashes due to alcohol. An amazing thing about this statistic is that The United States has the highest BAC legal limit. This means a DUI in other countries may not be a DUI here (NHTSA, 2000). Drinking and driving is one of the main concerns in Americans today, and if Europeans find themselves with a much lower DUI rate, why do we not learn from them and follow them? Those with opposing views may bring up the statistics. It is true that alcohol related auto deaths have declined, but this decrease is said to be due to the change in drinking and driving laws, as well as the increased enforcement of DUI laws (Kluger et al, 2001). It is not safe to

assume that the drinking age had anything to do with the lowering of alcohol fatalities, because in the 1980's when the United States lowered the drinking age, the fatalities did not just lower in America, but they lowered all over the world (Sweedler, 2001). This means there could be other better alternatives to controlling and preventing alcohol related crashes. Instead of using funds to catch and prohibit underage people from drinking, they should find alternative ways and also educate younger people in safe drinking. The National Survey on Drug Use and Health reported that morbidity and mortality associated with alcohol use in young adults has had a 12% increase from 1998-2001 (Barnett, 2008). This is just reinforcement that the current drinking law does not help. Even if driving casualties are decreasing, the overall mortality rate is increasing. Professor Michael Clay Smith compares the drinking age as America's second attempt at Prohibition, and he says it is as big a failure as the first (Smith and Smith, 1999). In 1920 the US government prohibited the consumption and sale of alcohol. They did this to cut down crime and corruption as well as many other social problems. As you may know, this not only failed, but it also increased alcohol consumption and crime. The death rate from alcohol initially dropped the year Prohibition went into effect, but after the first year the rate increased for the next 12 years of Prohibition (Thornton, 1991). This goes to show that people are still going to drink, and they might even drink more than they did to begin with. People want what they cannot have. Products that are illegal have that allure to them and it makes people want to indulge in it. The same effects are believed to have been produced from the current drinking age. Kids are still going to drink and now that they

cannot do it legally they are going to have to do it in unsafe situations.

Professor Smith suggests that we learn from our mistakes the first time we tried this. If making it illegal for kids under 21 does not deter them from drinking then maybe instead we should educate the youth into making wise decision with alcohol consumption. The current law also seems very inconsistent. At the age of 18 people can vote, get married, have a family of their own, buy and use tobacco, be financial responsible, and most of all, we can go to war. When you think of the responsibilities and freedoms that come with being 18, it is pretty incredible that people are not allowed to drink. Being able to risk your life for your country and fire a weapon to protect your countrymen is a large responsibility and position to be able have. Being able to put your life on the line for your country seems like a greater responsibility then being able to drink. You protect Americans who, themselves can consume alcohol, but you cannot. That does not seem right to me. The right to vote enables us to have a say in what happens in our country. This is quite a responsibility and privilege and holds a great deal of weight. Is this saying that we need to be more mature to drink, than to make a smart decision that could affect the future of our country? If we are old enough to be able to make a decision of that magnitude we should be able to have an alcoholic beverage. Also look at the ages at which Americans can get married; in most states if you are over 18 you can get married. That is a decision that changes your life, it requires maturity. At 18 you can also buy and use tobacco. Tobacco is a product proven to cause harm to you directly. If you smoke one cigarette, it can be directly harmful. Having one drink of alcohol will not directly affect you to the extent

cigarettes or other tobacco products can. So if these products are available to you at 18, why should alcohol be illegal? Cigarettes are responsible for every 1 in 6 deaths in America each year. 390,000 deaths are caused by cigarettes per year, compared to 100,000 alcohol related deaths (Roy Castle International Centre for Lung Cancer Research, 2010). If we are able to purchase something over 3 times more deadly at the age of 18, we should be able to consume alcohol. Another point the opposing side brings up is the "low hanging fruit" effect. This means that they think if the age is changed to 18, then the age group right under them will be able to get alcohol easily. The truth of the matter is that it is already fairly easy to get alcohol despite your age. In 2005 the NIAAA found in a survey that 71% of 8th graders say it is easy to get (NIAAA, 2005). So 13 year-old kids can already get alcohol. So it seems that it would not greatly affect the number of younger kids who would drink.

There have been recent pushes to have the legal age dropped, but so far there has been little success. There are a few states that have truly considered dropping the age, but with the government having installed the National Minimum Drinking Age Act of 1984, they would lose too much funds. The Act says that if states did not raise the drinking age to 21, then they would lose ten percent of federal highway funding. If the government had to add this consequence, it makes you wonder if state governments did not see an advantage in raising the drinking age. The evidence is there supporting the lowering of the drinking age. Many adults in authoritative roles, like professors and presidents of colleges, have realized that people under 21 are going to drink, specifically in college. So instead of forcing drinking to be a hidden event, they want people to be able

to enjoy it responsibly in a safe environment. Lowering the drinking age to 18 would help people's alcohol awareness and hopefully promote safe, responsible drinking. That is why we should lower the drinking age in the United States of America. Hopefully this paper has made you think the same way. Works Cited " Binge Culture." Christian Century 125. 25 (2008): 7-7. Academic Search Premier. Web. 05 Mar. 2010. Calkins, Chelsea. " Should the Drinking Age Be Lowered: Pro." Thesmokesignal. org. 20 Nov. 2007. Web. 07 Mar. 2010. . " Cigarette Smoking Facts." Learninginfo. org. Web. 07 Mar. 2010. . " Drinking Age Should Be Lowered to 18." Socialissues. wiseto. com. The Gale Group. Web. 05 Mar. 2010. . Guenther, Scott, Jay Harbison, Grace Kronenberg, and Conor J. Stinson. " One Benefit to a Lower Drinking Age: Fewer Alcohol Emergencies." Letter to Robert Voas. 25 Jan. 2006. Christian Science Monitor. 41st ed. Vol. 98. 8-8. Academic Search Premier. Web. 07 Mar. 2010. . " On DWI Laws in OTher Countries." Home | National Highway Traffic Safety Administration(NHTSA) | U. S. Department of Transportation. Nhtsa. Web. 25 Mar. 2010.