

## ASAP: The holidays are a time for choices

By Rick Gross, Program Manager, Army Substance Abuse Program 10 December 2018



*Lt. Col. Sally Hannan, Garrison Commander, Lisa Wilson, ASAP, and Command Sgt. Maj. Jamie Lethiecq, stand in front of a stark reminder of what can happen if you drink and drive.*

The holidays. A time for relaxation. A time for tradition. A time when we cherish the joys of friends and family while trying not to fight with them because they annoy us!

Many people often increase alcohol consumption around this time of year. There are many reasons for this. Holidays are relaxing, and many people associate relaxation with alcohol use (being able to sleep off hangovers doesn't hurt!). Holidays are full of tradition, and alcohol is part of many people's traditions. Alcohol can be a time for bonding with family, as well as a way to unwind from the stress of being around them. Alcohol plays many roles at this time of year.

If you increase alcohol consumption during the holidays, I encourage you to take a moment to consider both the Good Things and the potential Not-So-Good Things about this choice. I already mentioned some of the

Good Things: relaxation, traditions, family/friend bonding, and a way to de-stress.

What about the Not-So-Good Things? You probably expect me to write about things like DUIs, fatal car crashes, and liver disease. For today, those are not the primary concerns I want you to consider. While they are real and they do happen to people (including soldiers and family members), you are less likely to experience one of those disastrous Not-So-Good Things than you are to experience a subtler but still serious Not-So-Good Thing.

For example, you may not get a DUI but you may drink a little too much and then say something to a spouse or friend that results in an argument. Or perhaps while tipsy, that anger you've been storing up about the poor decisions a loved one is making come pouring out of you in a way you didn't intend. Or maybe, despite your commitment to work out and eat healthy over the holidays, after your fourth glass of wine you decide to go ahead and eat that third piece of cake.

These types of Not-So-Good Things aren't going to cause serious life-altering consequences like a DUI might. But they are problematic nonetheless. These types of problems are red flags. They are warning signs that something is out of balance and needs adjustment. The good news is that this is the easiest time to make changes. Assuming your alcohol use is not out of control, recognizing and acknowledging these warning signs can help you quickly make some course corrections. Simply decreasing alcohol use is often enough to avoid these types of Not-So-Good Things. On the other hand, if you ignore them or pretend like alcohol isn't part of the problem then you are likely to repeat the behavior and the problems will likely get worse over time.

The Army acknowledges Drunk and drugged Driving (3-D) Month in December. The crashed car at the Claremont gate represents the serious dangers of drunk and drugged driving. As you pass that crashed car, I encourage you to think about the subtler Not-So-Good Things of increased alcohol consumption. While not as devastating as a destroyed car, the person who crashed that car almost certainly experienced these same red flags and chose to ignore them. This year, be attentive to those warning signs. Monitor your alcohol use and live the healthiest life you can. If you need help getting started call the Army Substance Abuse Clinic at 245-4576 or the Dunham Clinic Behavioral Health Program at 245-4602. Army Strong!

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