

## ALCOHOL USE

Alcohol is a central nervous system depressant that, in small amounts, can have a relaxing effect. According to the *2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, when alcohol is consumed it should be in moderation and limited to no more than one drink per day for women and two drinks per day for men.<sup>2</sup> While moderate alcohol consumption may have some health benefits primarily related to reducing risk of cardiovascular disease,<sup>3</sup> excessive drinking can lead to many adverse health and social consequences including injury, violence, risky sexual behavior, alcoholism, unemployment, liver diseases, and various cancers.<sup>4</sup>

Excessive drinking includes binge drinking and heavy drinking. The National Survey on Drug Use and Health defines binge drinking as having five or more drinks on one occasion (at

the same time or within a couple of hours of each other). Heavy drinking is defined as binge drinking on 5 or more of the past 30 days. Thus, binge drinking includes heavy drinking. While not presented here, the CDC has also defined heavy drinking as consuming more than one drink per day on average for women and two drinks per day on average for men.<sup>4</sup>

In 2007–2009, a greater percentage of men than women aged 18 and older reported past month alcohol use (62.3 versus 49.4 percent, respectively). Men were also more likely than women to report binge drinking (34.3 versus 16.5 percent, respectively) and heavy drinking (11.6 versus 3.6 percent, respectively). Despite being less likely to binge drink or drink heavily, women tend to face alcohol-related problems at a lower drinking level than men due to differences

in body size and other biological factors.<sup>5</sup>

Binge and heavy drinking among women varies significantly by age and race and ethnicity. Younger women aged 18–25 years were more likely than women of other age groups to report binge and heavy drinking in the past month (33.8 and 9.1 percent, respectively; data not shown). With respect to race and ethnicity, binge drinking was highest among non-Hispanic Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islanders and non-Hispanic American Indian/Alaska Native women (27.7 and 21.3 percent, respectively). However, heavy drinking was most common among non-Hispanic White women and non-Hispanic women of multiple races, as well as non-Hispanic American Indian/Alaska Native women (4.1, 4.3, and 4.4 percent, respectively). Non-Hispanic Asian women were least likely to report binge and heavy drinking.

### Past Month Alcohol Use Among Adults Aged 18 and Older, by Level of Drinking\* and Sex, 2007–2009

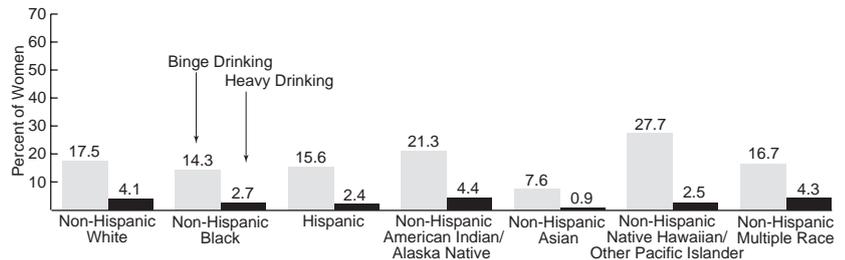
Source II.3: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, National Survey on Drug Use and Health



\*Any drinking indicates at least 1 drink in past month; binge drinking indicates 5 or more drinks on the same occasion in the past month; heavy drinking indicates 5 or more drinks on the same occasion for 5 or more days in the past month.

### Binge and Heavy Alcohol Consumption\* in the Past Month Among Women Aged 18 and Older, by Race/Ethnicity, 2007–2009

Source II.3: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, National Survey on Drug Use and Health



\*Binge drinking indicates 5 or more drinks on the same occasion in the past month; heavy drinking indicates 5 or more drinks on the same occasion on 5 or more days in the past month.