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College Students Returning Home for the Holidays: Beware of 'Drinksgiving'

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Thanksgiving is a holiday about family and friends — reconnecting over food and drink. For college students coming home for the holiday break, a new tradition has emerged, and it can have tragic consequences.

Known as “Blackout Wednesday,” and even “Drinksgiving,” the evening before Thanksgiving sees college students packing local bars to catch up with hometown friends, binge drinking as the night wears on.

— *an announcement from* [Mountainside Treatment Center](#)

The restaurant management platform [Upserve](#) found that beer sales soared by 270 percent and liquor sales jumped 114 percent on Blackout Wednesday in a 2016 survey of 3,000 restaurants across the country.

As the name “Blackout Wednesday” suggests, during this celebration one drink can quickly become four or five over the course of two hours – an alcohol consumption rate that meets the [National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism’s criteria for binge drinking](#).

This can lead to dangerous side effects including dizziness, memory lapses (blackouts), and seizures. Excessive drinking also lowers inhibitions, increasing the risk of alcohol-related accidents and injuries.

Unfortunately, drunk driving is another hazard linked to this emerging cultural trend. The [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#) reports that Blackout Wednesday and the remainder of the Thanksgiving break (from 6 p.m. on Wednesday to 6 a.m., Monday) produced the highest number of fatal car crashes of any holiday between 2012 and 2016, accounting for 800 drunk driving-related deaths.

What Students Can Do

“To make the most of your time with family and friends during the holidays, set goals for yourself to follow when it comes to your drinking patterns,” says Carolee Paruta, regional director of outpatient services at Mountainside Treatment Center.

“For example, eat before drinking to prevent yourself from going overboard.

“Another way to lower your alcohol intake is to have a glass of water between alcoholic beverages, which also helps you to stay hydrated.

“Of course, if you are in recovery, remember that protecting your sobriety is your number one priority. So, find friends who are supportive of your sobriety and will spend time with you in an alcohol-free environment.”

College students can take several precautions to prevent an alcohol-fueled mishap from ruining their holiday weekend. To reduce the risk of drunk driving accidents, those looking to celebrate can utilize public transportation or a taxi service, or ask a sober friend for a ride home.

[Editor's note: Darien police have said that many people leaving bars in town late at night seem to be using Uber, Lyft or other car services rather than get behind the wheel.]

About Mountainside Treatment Center

[Mountainside](#) is a behavioral health clinic providing individualized alcohol and drug addiction treatment. It has locations in Wilton and Canaan in Connecticut, and Chappaqua and New York City in New York state.