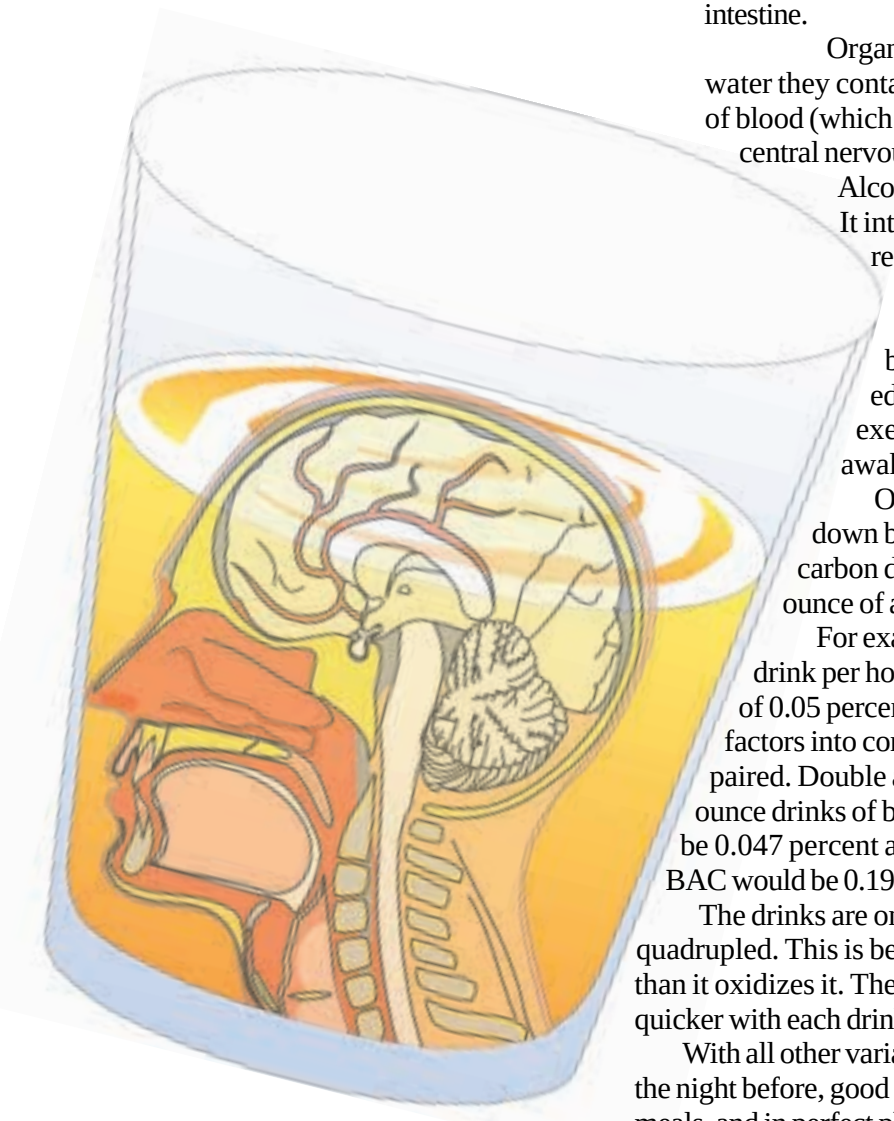
Twice the Drinks; Four Times As Drunk



Beer, wine and liquor contain ethyl alcohol. It has no nutritional value and doesn't follow normal digestive patterns. Instead, it's immediately absorbed into the bloodstream through the walls of the stomach and small intestine.

Organs retain alcohol in proportion to the amount of water they contain. Because the brain has a high concentration of blood (which is 90 percent water), alcohol quickly affects the central nervous system, usually within minutes.

Alcohol reduces control, judgment and coordination. It interferes with your perception, speech and reflexes.

Although alcohol is rapidly absorbed into the system, it takes a long time for the body and brain to return to normal. All the age-old remedies—black coffee, cold showers, fresh air, and exercise—are useless. The only result is a wide-awake drunk.

Once in the bloodstream, alcohol must be broken down by the liver and oxidized (turned into water and carbon dioxide). The liver converts less than one-half ounce of alcohol per hour.

For example, a 160-pound man having one 1.5-ounce drink per hour during a six-hour period would have a BAC of 0.05 percent; which is still legally sober. Taking other factors into consideration, however, he may be greatly impaired. Double alcohol intake to two bottles of beer or two 1.5-ounce drinks of bourbon per hour, and the drinker's BAC would be 0.047 percent at the end of the first hour. After six hours, the BAC would be 0.191—definitely impaired.

The drinks are only doubled, but the degree of drunkenness is quadrupled. This is because the body absorbs alcohol at a higher rate than it oxidizes it. The cumulative effect causes a person to get drunk quicker with each drink.

With all other variables eliminated—no medication, plenty of rest the night before, good relations with his boss and his family, eating full meals, and in perfect physical condition—he still could become impaired after "slamming" just a few drinks. A