had consumed that half pint of vodka in one hour. However, if he were to sip at it over a period of four or five hours he would only be mildly high.

**ALCOHOL, A STIMULANT OR DEPRESSANT?**

Contrary to widely held beliefs, alcohol is not a stimulant, but a depressant. The misconception arises, apparently, because the early effects of alcohol are felt as a relaxant; it relieves tension, makes one more “outgoing,” enables one to converse more easily and “stimulates” the appetite. It also tends to raise the noise level at parties, and makes loneliness and boredom more tolerable. Actually, alcohol depresses that portion of the brain first that controls those things we learned most recently including our tendency to worry, to be inhibited in conversation, to limit our food intake, to restrict ourselves to socially acceptable conversation—and to observe the distinction of rank. One of the first things alcohol does for us then, is to make all those things come easier that would otherwise be cause for concern. This is what makes alcohol such an essential element in so many social gatherings; by depressing that part of the brain that controls inhibition the less inhibited behavior appears to be stimulated. The desired effect can be achieved by most people on one or two drinks, *i.e.*, with a very low concentration of alcohol.

---

**The nature of impairment:**

Unfortunately, many of us do not limit ourselves to one or two drinks nor are these “desirable” effects the only effects of low concentrations. Even at these levels alcohol begins to have an effect on various faculties. For example, after two drinks (or two cans of beer) our light threshold is altered. That is, alcohol has a dimming effect on our vision so that we need more light to see a dimly lit object. This could be critical while on patrol at dusk or performing other nocturnal duties. Similarly, the pupils normally control the amount of light entering the eyes by expanding in darkness and contracting in light. This important reflex is disrupted by alcohol; the result is that many persons are more easily blinded by sudden changes in light conditions after they have had a few drinks.

It should also be noted that the eyes transmit individual images to the brain where they are coordinated so we see only one image. One of the early effects of alcohol is to anesthetize the many nerves from the eyes to the brain disrupting the transmission of messages which results in blurred or double vision.

Alcohol also causes a delay in perceiving danger because the information processing mechanism in the brain is anesthetized and, once a danger is recognized, the resulting action may be too late, too early, awkward or simply wrong. Many of these impairments can and do occur