

**HOW
MUCH IS
TOO
MUCH?**

Did you know?

Alcohol affects men and women differently. Women have a proportionally higher ratio of fat to water than men, which makes them less able to dilute alcohol in the body.

Drinking. Every unit counts.

This booklet explains the effects of alcohol on your health and on your social, home and work life. It tells you the number of units in popular alcoholic drinks so you can keep tabs on what you're drinking. And the back pages give useful advice and contact details if you want to cut down or get support.

Every unit counts

FRIDAY 5.30 PM

“Out of work and into the pub for a quick pint. The weekend starts here.”

Drinking and you

It's not unusual to want to take a little time out and have a drink or two. The problem with alcohol is that sometimes one drink can very easily lead to another. Before you know it, you might have drunk more than you intended. There are plenty of positive things about having a drink. It helps you unwind and relax and it's enjoyable to do with friends. But regularly drinking more than the recommended daily amount of units has its risks.

NHS advice on drinking recommends that men should not regularly drink more than 3-4 units of alcohol a day and women should not regularly drink more than 2-3 units a day. Pregnant women or women trying to conceive should avoid drinking alcohol. If they do choose to drink, to minimise the risk to the baby, they should not drink more than 1-2 units once or twice a week and should not get drunk.

You may want to keep track of what you drink in a day or an evening, and count your units. Be aware of the health and personal safety risks you face if you go over the NHS-recommended limit – this will help you make an informed choice as to how and when you drink.



MEN

Should not regularly drink more than 3-4 units a day



WOMEN

Should not regularly drink more than 2-3 units a day



PREGNANT WOMEN

Avoid alcohol altogether
Never more than 1-2 units
once or twice a week

Tip: have something to eat before your first drink.

How drinking affects your health



Worried about whether drinking is damaging your health? More than one in four men and one in seven women drink more than the NHS recommended regular daily limits of 2-3 units for women and 3-4 units for men, at least on some days. Drinking like this regularly is risky to your health, but when asked, 'how much do you drink?', many people actually underestimate how much alcohol they are drinking.

People who drink heavily are not necessarily 'addicted' to alcohol, but for many reasons they have got into the habit of consuming it regularly or in 'binges' of heavy drinking. Such drinking has short- and long-term risks.

Short-term risks:

- anxiety
- sexual difficulties such as impotence
- slowed breathing and heartbeat
- loss of consciousness
- accidents and injuries
- suffocation through choking on your own vomit
- potentially fatal poisoning.

Every unit counts

FRIDAY 7.00 PM

"I get home, and my partner is already cooking dinner. I'll have a bottle of beer while I help."

Did you know?

Alcohol is fattening. If you added three or four gin and tonics a day to your usual diet, you could put on 4lbs over four weeks.

Long-term risks:

Drinking more than the recommended number of units regularly over a long period of time can lead to:

- certain types of cancer, especially breast cancer
- memory loss, brain damage or even dementia
- increased risk of heart disease and certain types of stroke
- liver disease, such as cirrhosis and liver cancer
- stomach ulcers.

As you get older, the risks are greater.

Your body is less able to process alcohol, and, so you may find that the time it takes you to recover from a drinking session is longer than it was when you were younger. If you fall, you are more likely to seriously injure yourself too.

Your looks may suffer

if you drink too much. Not only is alcohol high in calories, making you put on weight, it has been linked to skin problems and signs of premature ageing too.

Choices

- don't mix alcohol with any kind of medication as it can reduce the effect of the medication and increase harmful side-effects
 - don't mix alcohol with recreational drugs
 - If you are pregnant or trying to conceive, stop drinking altogether or cut down to no more than 1-2 units once or twice a week, and do not get drunk.
 - don't drink if you have mental health problems, such as depression. It can make it worse
 - don't drink and drive or operate machinery.
-

Many problems triggered by drinking can get better if you stop or cut down.



1.1 units
per 275ml
Beer



2.3 units
per pint
Lager

Tip: if you have a pre-dinner drink and you are planning to drink later on, make this one a low (or no) alcohol one.

The people around you



It's not only the health effects of drinking that you need to be aware of. Alcohol can also put you in unsafe or embarrassing situations because it can impair your judgement. If you've ever woken up one morning and regretted something you said or did the night before, chances are you'd had too much to drink.

If you are drunk you might put yourself at risk of having unprotected sex, of being mugged or of getting into fights – you could even end up being arrested or given an anti-social behaviour order. There is also a very strong link between alcohol and becoming a victim of sexual assault or violence.

At first, drinking makes you feel relaxed and happy. When drunk frequently, alcohol becomes a depressant. If you regularly drink more than the recommended limit, alcohol can affect your moods and behaviour. And that means it will also affect the people around you: your partner, your friends, your children and the people you work with.

Every unit counts

FRIDAY 8.30 PM

“Sit down to dinner and crack open a bottle of red. Have a couple of glasses each.”

Did you know?

If you have had a heavy drinking session, it is best to avoid alcohol for 48 hours to give your body time to recover.

At home

Plenty of jokes are made about alcohol affecting men's sexual performance. Generally, they're true. Alcohol can make men impotent. It can also put a heavy emotional strain on relationships – marriages in which alcohol is an issue are twice as likely to end in divorce. Alcohol is also a major factor in domestic violence.

Don't forget that children learn about behaviour largely from their parents. How you drink may well affect how they drink too, both now and in the future. So try to set a good example by drinking in moderation.

At work

If you are feeling anxious or depressed because of the amount of alcohol you are drinking, your behaviour may affect the people you work with too. Taking time off work puts extra pressure on colleagues who have to cover while you're away. It's not the best way to further your career or build good working relationships.

Alcohol and children:

- it is illegal to give alcohol to a child under five, even at home
- it is illegal for anyone under 18 to buy – or be bought – alcohol, unless they are 16 or 17 and having a meal in a bar or restaurant
- if your child is curious about alcohol, try to talk about it naturally and make sure you have the facts
- if your child does drink, try and talk to him or her about it calmly. Don't give a lecture or get angry.

Choices

Don't drink and...

- drive
 - use any type of machine or equipment
 - use a ladder or work at heights
 - take part in any sports.
-



2.3 units
per 175ml
Red wine



1.0 units
per 25ml
Whisky

Tip: why not try using small glasses instead of larger ones? 1 small glass of wine at 12.5% alcohol is around 1.5 units, a large glass can contain 3 units or more.

Over the limit?



Staying within NHS-recommended limits for drinking alcohol has clear health benefits.

It also helps you avoid being fined for alcohol-related anti-social behaviour or being prosecuted for drink-driving.

Drinking and driving

Legally, the alcohol limit for drinking and driving is 80mg in 100ml of blood. You can't translate that into numbers of drinks easily – it depends on factors such as your weight and metabolism.

Any amount of alcohol in your blood will impair your ability to drive. So it's much safer not to drink at all than to try to calculate the amount of alcohol you are drinking. You could find you are over the limit without intending to be.

If you've had a heavy night drinking, you may still be over the limit the next morning. If you drive you could be prosecuted.

Every unit counts

FRIDAY 9.30 PM

“Almost finished our second bottle of red. Better polish it off rather than let it go to waste...”

Did you know?

If you are driving and have the legal limit of alcohol in your blood, you are more than twice as likely to have an accident than if you had not been drinking at all. The risk is up to five times greater if you are a less experienced driver.

If you are convicted of drink driving, you can face:

- a minimum 1 year driving ban
- a fine of up to £5000
- up to six months in prison.

Drinking and disorderly behaviour

Drinking can bring out the worst in people, sometimes making them violent and aggressive. If you drink or behave in a way that is anti-social, the police can fine you:

- **£50** if you drink alcohol in a 'no alcohol' public area, are drunk in the street or drink under the age of 18
- **£80** if you harass, alarm or distress someone or behave in a disorderly way
- **£80** if you are under 18 and try to buy alcohol or have it bought for you by someone else
- **£80** if you vomit or urinate in the street.

You may get over the fine. But it could take some time to shake off the humiliation and embarrassment of having been penalised by the police. It could even have consequences for your career.

And it's not only you who risks a fine. The person serving you alcohol may also be fined if you've clearly had too much to drink.



1.1 units
per 275ml
Beer



2.3 units
per pint
Lager

Tip: a glass of water helps alleviate some of the effects of dehydration from drinking alcohol.

Worried you're drinking too much?



You – or someone you know – could have a problem if:

- you get drunk regularly
- you can't stop once you've started
- you're drinking more than before
- you're losing interest in other things because of drink
- you're drinking alone
- you're making excuses to drink
- you're letting people down as a result of drinking
- you smell of alcohol during the day
- you feel guilty about drinking
- you get the shakes in the morning.

If you are concerned about whether your drinking fits into a healthy lifestyle, a test on our website will help you decide if you need to make any changes. It will also tell you what steps you can take to cut down or control your alcohol consumption.

Go to: www.drinkaware.co.uk

Every unit counts

FRIDAY 11.00 PM

“Sitting in front of the telly.
Fancy a nightcap...”

Tip: keep tabs on how many units you've had. Your total tonight is 11.3 units. Ask yourself, 'How often do I regularly drink so much more than the daily limit?'

Where to get help

If you are interested in how alcohol affects you, or think you may be drinking too much go to **www.drinkaware.co.uk**:
– log-on to ‘Down your Drink’ at **www.downyourdrink.org.uk**
– call Drinkline, the national alcohol helpline, on **0800 917 82 82**. Lines are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and calls are free from a landline
– visit your GP.

If you may have a problem with your drinking, are finding it difficult to cope on your own or are getting withdrawal symptoms, plenty of help and support is available. Visit your local alcohol help centre (listed in your telephone directory or contact Drinkline for details of local support).



2.3 units
per 175ml
Red wine



1.0 units
per 25ml
Whisky

Drinking and you: 10 ways to find the balance

- 1 Decide how many units you want to drink in an evening – and stick with it.**
 - 2 Reduce your units by choosing drinks that are not so strong.**
 - 3 Avoid ‘top-ups’ so you can keep track of your units.**
 - 4 Drink water before you go out. Then drink either water or a soft drink between each alcoholic drink.**
 - 5 Eat before you go out and while you are drinking.**
 - 6 If you think you may be drinking a bit much, set aside specific days in the week when you do not drink.**
 - 7 If you spend all your money on drink, take out less cash. Leave the credit cards at home.**
 - 8 Before you go out, think about how you are going to get home. If you are in a group, designate a non-drinking driver. Otherwise take a licensed taxi.**
 - 9 Don’t drink in rounds as you’ll tend to drink more.**
 - 10 Try not to go out too often with friends who drink heavily.**
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Know Your Units

'Low Alcohol' drinks	Bottle (330ml)	Can (440ml)	Pint (568ml)	Litre
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Beer, Lager & Cider at 2%	0.7 units	0.9 units	1.1 units	2 units
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Beer, Lager & Cider	Bottle (330ml)	Can (440ml)	Pint (568ml)	Litre
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4%	1.3 units	1.8 units	2.3 units	4 units
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5%	1.7 units	2.2 units	2.8 units	5 units
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6%	2 units	2.6 units	3.4 units	6 units
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'Super-Strength' drinks	Bottle (330ml)	Can (440ml)	Pint (568ml)	Litre
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Beer, Lager & Cider at 9%	3 units	4 units	5.1 units	9 units
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Alcopops 5%	Bottle (275ml)
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1.4 units

Spirits (38-40%)	Small measure (25ml)	Large measure (35ml)	Small double measure (50ml)	Large double measure (70ml)
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Gin, rum, vodka & whisky	1 unit	1.4 units	1.9 - 2 units	2.7 -2.8 units
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Shots (38-40%)	Small measure (25ml)	Large measure (35ml)
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Tequila, Sambuca	1 unit	1.3 units
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Shots may either be spirits or liqueurs, and are generally drunk very quickly. Different liqueurs can vary considerably in strength – they can be stronger or weaker than this example.

The NHS recommends that:

- men should not regularly drink more than 3 – 4 units of alcohol a day
- women should not regularly drink more than 2 – 3 units of alcohol a day.

Women should avoid drinking if they are pregnant or trying to conceive. If they do choose to drink, to protect the baby, they should not drink more than 1 to 2 units of alcohol once or twice a week and should not get drunk

The table below provides information on the number of units contained in some common drinks, based on typical alcoholic strengths. Check labels or ask bar-staff to identify the actual ABV % strength of what you are drinking, because different brands may be stronger or weaker than these examples.

To keep track of the units in your favourite drinks visit www.drinkaware.co.uk. Then you can easily keep count and make informed choices when you're out drinking.

Wine & champagne (red, white, rose or sparkling)	Small glass (125ml)	Standard glass (175ml)	Large glass (250ml)	Bottle (750ml)
10%	1.25 units	1.75 units	2.5 units	7.5 units
11%	1.4 units	1.9 units	2.8 units	8.3 units
12%	1.5 units	2.1 units	3 units	9 units
13%	1.6 units	2.3 units	3.3 units	9.8 units
14%	1.75 units	2.5 units	3.5 units	10.5 units
Fortified wine (17.5-20%)		Standard measure (50ml)		
Sherry & Port		0.9 - 1 unit		

Knowing your units

**How much is too much?
Try this quiz to help you
find out.**

How often?

1 How often do you have an alcoholic drink?

Never	A
Monthly or less	B
Two to four times a month	C
Two to three times a week	D
Four or more times a week	E

How much?

2 How many units of alcohol do you think it's healthy to drink each day?

None	A
Up to three	B
Up to four	C
Eight or more	D
As many as you like	E

How much do you drink?

3 How many units of alcohol do you drink in a typical evening?

One or two	A
Three or four	B
Five or six	C
Seven, eight or nine	D
Ten or more	E

How often?

4 How often do you drink more than six units of alcohol in one evening?

Never	A
Less than monthly	B
Monthly	C
Weekly	D
Daily or almost daily	E

Cause for concern?

5 Over the past six months, how many times have you been unable to stop drinking once you'd started?

Never	A
Less than monthly	B
Monthly	C
Weekly	D
Daily or almost daily	E

6 How often during the last six months have you missed work or not been able to do other things you were supposed to do because of drinking?

Never	A
Less than monthly	B
Monthly	C
Weekly	D
Daily or almost daily	E

7 How often during the last six months have you felt embarrassed, guilty or had regrets about what you might have done after a drinking session?

Never	A
Less than monthly	B
Monthly	C
Weekly	D
Daily or almost daily	E

8 How often during the last six months have you been aware of disturbing other people as a result of your drinking either through causing a mess (being sick, breaking things), waking up your neighbours, family or flatmates or getting into fights and arguments on your way home?

Never	A
Less than monthly	B
Monthly	C
Weekly	D
Daily or almost daily	E

9 Have you or someone else been injured as a result of your drinking?

No	A
Yes, but not in the last six months	B
Yes, during the last six months	C

10 Has a relative, friend or doctor been concerned about your drinking or suggested you cut down?

No	A
Yes, but not in the last six months	B
Yes, during the last six months	C

How did you score?

Mostly 'A's

You know your limits – to regularly drink no more than 2-3 units a day for women and 3-4 units for men – and you are sticking within them.

Mostly 'B's

You may know your limits, but occasionally you're drinking more than you should and this could affect your long-term health. Think about why you drink and look at some of the tips to cut down in this booklet.

Mostly 'C's

You are drinking considerably more than is recommended and could be damaging your health and putting your safety at risk. Keep tabs on your drinking and consider visiting your GP. Ring Drinkline on **0800 917 82 82** for advice on how to cut down.

Mostly 'D' and 'E's

You are drinking way above what is recommended on a regular basis and are risking heart and liver disease and other problems as a result. Visit your GP for advice. Don't stop drinking totally before seeing your GP as this can cause serious side effects.



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