



Sensible Drinking Information

Introduction

For many people having a drink with friends is an enjoyable and social activity. But, for others drinking can lead to a variety of problems.

This is because they drink too much, too often. Or, they may drink too much in settings that put them at risk of harming themselves or people around them.

Read on to get the information and advice you need to help decide whether or not you need to cut-down or even stop drinking. It may be that you need to get further information advice and support there are a list of local services that can help at the back of this leaflet.

What is one unit of alcohol?

So, how can you decide if you're drinking too much too often? Firstly, you need to work out **how many units** you usually drink.

Different types of drinks contain different strengths of alcohol, so some will have more units than others.

You can calculate the amount of alcohol in any drink if you know the quantity of liquid and the percentage of alcohol it contains.

We know you are not likely to remember a formula when you are having a drink, so we have given you a guide to the number of units contained in some popular drinks – see table below.

If can't find your favourite drink, here is the calculation formula to work it out for yourself:

The amount of units in a drink is calculated from the formula, $\frac{\text{Volume (mL)} \times \% \text{ alcohol (abv)}}{1000}$

A guide to the number of units in some popular drinks	
Pint or can or normal strength lager (Harp, Carling, Boddingtons etc)	2 units
Pint or can of strong lager (Stella, Red Stripe, Corona, Kronenberg etc)	3 units
Bottle of lager (Budwiezer, etc)	2 units
1 litre bottle of normal strength cider (Stongbow, woodpecker etc)	4.5 units
1 litre bottle of strong cider (white lightening etc)	8 units
1 bottle of alcopop (Bacardi Breezer, WKD, Smirnoff Ice etc)	2 units
75cl bottle of Sherry (QC, Harvey Bristol Cream)	26 units
75cl bottle of Port	15 units
75cl bottle of wine (wine come in different strengths check the label)	7-9 units
Large glass of wine in a pub	3 units
Standard size bottle of spirits (vodka, gin, brandy whiskey etc)	26-28 units
1 litre bottle of spirits (vodka, gin, brandy whiskey etc)	40 units
A single pub measure of spirits (vodka, gin, brandy whiskey etc)	1 units

How many units should I be drinking?

To help decide if someone is drinking too much, work out how many units they drink in an average week and compare this amount with the safe limits set out below.

For men the recommended safe limits for drinking are no more than 3-4 units a day. That means no more than 21 units per week

For women the recommended safe limits for drinking are no more than 2-3 units a day
That means no more than 14 units per week

Anyone who drinks should have at least two alcohol-free days every week.

If you are pregnant, it is recommended that you do not drink alcohol until after the birth of your baby

There are times when you will be at risk after drinking alcohol, so always avoid drinking alcohol before driving exercising or operating machinery.

How many units put you risk?

	Men	Women
Low Risk and SENSIBLE	Up to 3 standard drinks/day or 21 units a week	Up to 2 standard drinks/day or 14 units a week
Moderate Risk and HAZARDOUS	More than 3 standard drinks/day or up to 35 units a week	More than 2 standard drinks/day or up to 28 units a week
High Risk and DANGEROUS	More than 8 Standard drinks/day or over 42 units a week	More than 6 standard drinks/day or over 40 units a week

What are the benefits from cutting down on drinking?

If you drink above the recommended limits, you may have already experienced problems such as: tiredness, gaining extra weight, getting hangovers or sometimes not being able to remember what you did the night before.

Overall you won't be in the best of physical shape. If you continue drinking at harmful levels you can develop more severe problems such as high blood pressure, brain damage and liver disease.

Alcohol affects judgement and the ability to control impulses; this can lead people to do things that they wouldn't normally do sober. People can embarrass themselves or other people after drinking too much, have regretted sexual encounters or have arguments and fights.

Should YOU Cut Down Or Stop?

Most people who drink too much just need to cut down. Others will need to stop completely. It is important that you think about how your alcohol drinking is affecting you and the people around you:

1. How often do you have a drink containing alcohol?

Never 0 points	Monthly 1 point	2-4 times monthly 2 points	2-3 times weekly 3 points	4+ times weekly 4 points
-------------------	--------------------	-------------------------------	------------------------------	-----------------------------

2. How many units do you drink on a typical day when you drink? (use the table on this site to convert your drinks into (units))

1 or 2 units 0 points	2 or 3 units 1 point	5 or 6 units 2 points	7 or 8 units 3 points	10 or more units 4 points
--------------------------	-------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	------------------------------

3. How often during the last year did you find that you were unable to stop drinking once you had started?

Never 0 points	less than monthly 1 point	monthly 2 points	weekly 3 points	daily or almost daily 4 points
-------------------	------------------------------	---------------------	--------------------	-----------------------------------

4. How often during the last year have you not done what you should have because of your drinking? For example missing work or letting down friends and family.

Never 0 points	less than monthly 1 point	monthly 2 points	weekly 3 points	daily or almost daily 4 points
-------------------	------------------------------	---------------------	--------------------	-----------------------------------

5. Has a relative, friend, GP or nurse ever been concerned about your drinking or suggest that you cut-down?

No 0 points	Yes, but not in the past year 2 points	Yes during the past year 4 points
----------------	---	--------------------------------------

Results

Your Score	Recommendations	Advice
0 – 4	You are drinking at sensible levels	
5 – 10	You are drinking over sensible levels	It is likely that you are already experiencing problems. It may be time to consider changing your drinking habits or cutting-down. Please read through the help and tips section given in this leaflet.
11 – 20	You are drinking over sensible levels	You're drinking at harmful levels, and this is causing you and those around you problems. It would be helpful for you to seek advice and help about your drinking – please see the 'further help and support' section in this leaflet for local agencies who will be able to give you the information and support you need.

Will cutting down on drinking be difficult?

Sometimes drinking has become a habit, often if you change your routine and do different things you will find you don't crave alcohol as much as you thought you would. When you are cutting-down or stopping drinking support from family or friends can be of great help.

However, if you are used to drinking regularly you may have a strong desire to drink alcohol. You should talk to someone at your local service and they can help you plan for a change in lifestyle and advise if you need any medication to help you.

Tips and advice to help you change your drinking habits

If you have read through this website you will know quite a lot about the effects of alcohol and the problems they can cause for your health and your personal life.

In the rest of this booklet, we have laid out a **SIX RULES** that you can follow to help you cut down drinking.

1 IDENTIFY GOOD REASONS FOR CHANGING YOUR DRINKING HABITS

Deciding on good reasons for changing your drinking habits will help you to succeed. What we mean by a “good” reason is one that makes sense to you. Right now think of some good reasons for changing your habits.

There are dozens of good reasons to change your drinking habits; they will be different for each person. For example,

- you'll have more time for things you've always wanted to do
- you'll save a lot of money and be able to spend it on other things you enjoy
- you'll have more energy
- you'll lose weight
- you will be less likely to have arguments with those around you
- you'll be less likely to develop serious health problems such as liver disease

2 SET YOUR GOALS

Having a plan for changing your drinking means you need to set goals to work towards. You should pick a day when you are going to start your plan and set your daily drinking goals each week.

The next thing to do is to keep track of your drinking – this will help you work out whether you are meeting your goals and keeping on track.

The main thing to remember if you don't meet your goals is to keep on trying and to work out strategies to help you in the future.

3 RECOGNISE DIFFICULT TIMES

No matter how much you want to change your drinking habits there will be times when you'll find it difficult. We call these high-risk times.

Stop and think for moment about the last few times you were drinking too much. Where were you and what were you feeling?

The following is a list of common high risk times. You can use this list to help you think about your own high-risk times. In the next section we will get you to think of ways of coping with these difficult times.

- after work
- when I am out celebrating at a party or a club
- when I've had a really difficult day at work or looking after the children
- when I want to relax
- when I feel lonely or depressed

4 DEAL WITH DIFFICULT TIMES

You now have a list of the hardest times for you – so you've already worked out when you are most likely to drink. Now you have to work out how to deal with those difficult situations – without a drink in your hand.

WAYS OF COPING WITH DIFFICULT TIMES...

- avoid going to the pub after work – perhaps arrange a different social activity e.g. jogging
- avoid your friends who drink heavily
- plan activities or tasks at those times that you usually drink
- when you're bored or stressed have a physical workout or go for a walk instead of drinking
- eat a meal before drinking, it will make you feel more full and then you'll drink less
- remind yourself that the craving for the drink will go if you occupy yourself with something else
- avoid drinking in "shouts" or "rounds"
- dilute your drink e.g., add soda to wine and mixers to spirits
- practise refusing alcoholic drinks

5 FIND SOMEONE TO SUPPORT YOU

This plan is all about changing your habits. Some people find it easier to change a habit if they have someone to help them. This person could be your partner/friend, or someone at work who also wants to change their habits.

Your support person should be someone you can talk to easily, be honest with, and can ask for advice when you need it.

If you are very worried about the effects of drinking on your health, your doctor or nurse can help you. There are also special alcohol counsellors for this reason and a telephone number to contact them is listed on the last page of this booklet.

6 STICK TO YOUR GOALS

Drinking alcohol is an enjoyable part of many people's lives – a habit that they'd feel lost without. This type of habit is hard to break. However, the information you've written down in this booklet will help you.

REMEMBER; Every time you stop yourself from doing something by habit, you are one step nearer to breaking the habit altogether.

For Further Advice And Information, YOU Can Contact:

Drinkline - The National Alcohol Helpline

0800 917 8282 - (England and Wales, Mon -Fri, 9am -11pm)

Drinkline offers free, confidential information and advice on alcohol.

Alcoholics Anonymous

Helpline: 0845 769 7555; email: helpline@alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk

Contact details for all English AA meetings. There is a quiz to determine whether AA is the right type of organisation for an individual, and a frequently asked question section about AA and alcoholism.

Al-Anon Family Groups UK and Eire

Helpline: 020 7403 0888 (10am -10pm, 365 days a year); email: enquiries@al-anonuk.org.uk

Support group for friends and families of alcoholics. Includes a frequently asked questions section, pamphlets and other literature, and information on group meetings in the UK.

Alcohol Concern

Tel: 020 7928 7377; email: contact@alcoholconcern.org.uk

This site provides information and articles on a range of topics surrounding alcoholism. Includes 18 excellent factsheets crammed with information that would be very useful for professionals such as Alcohol and the Law and Drink-drive accidents, a search engine, and a good list of alcohol related links.

Alcohol Focus Scotland

Tel: 0141 572 6700; email: enquiries@alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk

The national volunteer organisation for alcohol issues in Scotland. Provides information about alcohol, including legal matters, frequently asked questions, and tips for safe drinking.

www.downyourdrink.org.uk

Based at University College London Medical School, and managed by the charity Alcohol Concern, this site is designed to help you work out whether you're drinking too much, and if so, what you can do about it.

ADD LOCAL CONTACTS