

Units and you



**ALCOHOL
KNOW YOUR
LIMITS**

SHOULD NOT REGULARLY EXCEED	
MEN	WOMEN
3-4	2-3
UNITS DAILY	UNITS DAILY

Every unit counts

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



Did you know that a double gin and tonic contains 2 units of alcohol? And that if women regularly exceed 2–3 units a day it could add up to a serious health problem?

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. 'Regularly' means drinking every day or most days of the week.

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 and women trying to conceive

Should avoid alcohol altogether

Never more than 1–2 units once or twice a week

How drinking affects your health



Did you know that if you regularly exceed your recommended daily alcohol limit, you increase the risk of having a stroke through high blood pressure?

Worried about whether drinking is damaging your health? Nearly one in three men and one in five women drink more than the NHS recommended regular daily limits of 2–3 units for women and 3–4 units for men. Drinking like this most days of the week is risky to your health, but when asked, ‘how much do you drink?’, many people actually underestimate how much alcohol they are drinking.

Most 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 long and short-term risks.

Short-term risks of heavy drinking:

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

Long-term risks of heavy drinking:

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

The harmful effects of drinking too much when you're young may not become obvious for several years. And as you get older, the risks to your health increase. Your body is less able to process alcohol, 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.

Advice

- 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, you should stop drinking altogether. If you do drink, never have more than 1–2 units once or twice a week and do not get drunk
- be careful if you have mental health problems such as depression, as alcohol can make these worse
- don't drink and drive or operate machinery.

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



Sparkling wine
175ml glass
1.9 units
ABV 11%



Wine
250ml glass
3 units
ABV 12%



Wine
750ml bottle
9.8 units
ABV 13%

How drinking affects those 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 but when drunk excessively alcohol can be a depressant, affecting your mood 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.

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 hungover, unwell, anxious and depressed because of the amount of alcohol you are drinking, this may affect your work or the people you work with. 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.



Lager pint
2.8 units
ABV 5%



Beer pint
2.3 units
ABV 4%



Cider pint
3.4 units
ABV 6%



Did you know that if you regularly stay within your recommended daily alcohol limit, you're more likely to look and feel in better shape?

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 with someone aged 18 or over who can buy them beer, cider or wine during a table 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.

Advice

Don't drink and...

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



PINT CIDER: ABV 5.3%
3 UNITS



RED WINE (125ML): ABV 12.5%
1.6 UNITS



SAMBUCA SHOT: ABV 42%
1 UNIT

Units. They



ALCOPOP: ABV 5%
1.4 UNITS



HALF PINT CIDER: ABV 5.3%
1.5 UNITS



SINGLE GIN & TONIC: ABV 40%
1 UNIT



CHAMPAGNE (175ml): ABV 11.5%
2 UNITS



DOUBLE WHISKY & COKE: ABV 40%
2 UNITS



HALF PINT LAGER: ABV 5.2%
1.5 UNITS



BOTTLE LAGER: ABV 5.2%
1.7 UNITS



BOTTLE OF WINE: ABV 13.5%
10 UNITS



WHITE WINE (175ml): ABV 13%
2.3 UNITS

all add up.



DOUBLE COGNAC: ABV 40%
2 UNITS



PINT LAGER: ABV 5.2%
3 UNITS



PIMMS: ABV 25%
1.3 UNITS



COSMOPOLITAN COCKTAIL
2 UNITS



DOUBLE WHISKY: ABV 40%
2 UNITS



PINT BITTER: ABV 4%
2.3 UNITS

Over the limit?



Did you know if you regularly exceed your recommended daily alcohol limit, you could suffer from enlargement of the liver?

Staying within NHS recommended limits for regular drinking puts you at low risk of getting any alcohol-related health problems.

But your health is not the only thing you need to be careful about when making choices about drinking.

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 age, gender, weight and metabolism.

Even if you are under the legal limit you can still be unfit to drive due to alcohol – and the penalties are the same as for exceeding the limit.

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 or unfit to drive the next day. If you drive you could be prosecuted and lose your driving licence.

If you are convicted of drink driving, you face:

- a minimum 1 year driving ban
- a fine of up to £5000
- up to six months in prison
- endorsement of your driving licence for 11 years.

Drinking and disorderly behaviour

Drinking can bring out the worst in people, sometimes making them 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.



Spirit double
50ml measure
2 units

ABV 40%



Alcopop
275ml bottle
1.4 units

ABV 5%



Shot 25ml
measure
1 unit

ABV 40%

Worried you're drinking too much?



Did you know that women who regularly exceed the recommended daily alcohol limit increase their risk of breast cancer by a third?

You – or someone you know – could have a problem if any of these sound familiar:

- 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
- you're not sure how much you're drinking.

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.nhs.uk/units**

Where to get help

If you think you are drinking too much, you may well be able to cut down on your own using the tips on this page. If you find it difficult to go it alone or are getting withdrawal symptoms, plenty of help and support is available. Try visiting your GP or checking out www.nhs.uk/units

If you think you may have a problem with your drinking, visit your GP or call 0800 917 8282 (textphone 0800 027 4114) for advice and details of local support.

If you are a heavy drinker and might suffer alcohol withdrawal symptoms, NEVER stop drinking suddenly. Instead, cut down a little and get immediate medical advice.

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.**

Know your units

'LOW ALCOHOL' DRINKS

	Bottle (330ml)	Can (440ml)	Pint (568ml)	Litre
Beer, Lager & Cider at 2%	0.7 units	0.9 units	1.1 units	2 units

BEER, LAGER & CIDER

	Bottle (330ml)	Can (440ml)	Pint (568ml)	Litre
4%	1.3 units	1.8 units	2.3 units	4 units
5%	1.7 units	2.2 units	2.8 units	5 units
6%	2 units	2.6 units	3.4 units	6 units

'SUPER-STRENGTH' DRINKS

	Bottle (330ml)	Can (440ml)	Pint (568ml)	Litre
Beer, Lager & Cider at 9%	3 units	4 units	5.1 units	9 units

ALCOPOPS (5%)

Bottle (275ml)
1.4 units

SPIRITS (38–40%)

	Small measure (25ml)	Large measure (35ml)	Small double measure (50ml)	Large double measure (70ml)
Gin, rum, vodka & whisky	1 unit	1.3–1.4 units	1.9–2 units	2.7–2.8 units

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.

‘Regularly’ means drinking every day or most days of the week.

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. The ABV (alcohol by volume) shows what percentage of a drink is pure alcohol – the higher the percentage, the stronger the drink. Check labels – increasingly bottles and cans show the number of units they contain. Or ask bar staff to identify the actual ABV % strength of what you are drinking, because different brands may be stronger or weaker than the examples given below.

To keep track of the units in your favourite drinks, visit www.nhs.uk/units Then you can easily keep count and make informed choices when you’re out drinking.

SHOTS (38–40%)

Small measure (25ml)

Large measure (35ml)

Tequila

Sambuca

1 unit

1.3–1.4 units

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.

WINE & CHAMPAGNE

Small glass (125ml)

Standard glass (175ml)

Large glass (250ml)

Bottle (750ml)

(red, white, rose or sparkling)

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



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