

Alcohol, Risk Reduction and Overdose

ALCOHOL



Category: depressant/'downer'

Class: legal for adults over 18

How long to take effect: 5 minutes

How long it stays in your body: alcohol is removed from the body at an average rate of 1 unit per hour

What does it do? - Alcohol is a legal (in certain circumstances) depressant that slows down the messages travelling between the brain and the body. It slows down your heart rate, breathing rate and your core temperature. In small amounts, alcohol can cause you to feel relaxed, more confident and heighten your emotions. It can affect your vision, make your speech slurred and affect your coordination. It lowers inhibitions and increases confidence. It can make you feel violent, aggressive, angry, and down.

Risks - Alcohol depresses the nerves that control actions such as breathing and your gag reflex. Alcohol is an irritant to the stomach which means vomiting is common. You are at risk of choking on your own vomit while sleeping which can lead to death. Also, alcohol lowers your core temperature which makes you at risk of hypothermia. People build up tolerance to alcohol over time which means you have to drink more to have the feelings of being drunk.

Alcohol also affects your coordination which means falls are common - this can lead to a variety of injuries.

Excessive drinking can cause problems in finances, relationships, family life and employment.

Risk reduction

- Avoid mixing alcohol and other drugs. It can confuse the system and creates unpredictable effects.
- Try to stay aware of your own limits
- Always try to eat before drinking alcohol - drinking on an empty stomach can lead to stomach problems and can make the effects of alcohol quicker
- Do not drive under the influence of alcohol
- Make sure you know how you are getting home if out with friends and have your phone
- Do not leave your drink unattended

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

It is difficult to see when alcohol may be a problem - in yourself or in someone you care about. People often cope with things differently, someone may drink excessively over a few days to cope with an event that happens in their life, drink to celebrate or drink to socialise, but that may not mean that there is a 'problem' or 'addiction'.

Addiction is when a person becomes physically and/or psychologically dependent. Dependency is a feeling of not being able to do without alcohol and a desperate need to get alcohol and take it to alleviate feelings that come from not having it. Addiction may also be when regular patterns of drinking shows e.g. drinking every weekend or every day.

If you or someone you know is drinking more than usual, you may not notice until it becomes very clear e.g. something happens such as injury from drinking too much, erratic behaviour and issues in your personal life like your family, relationships or finances.

The most common sign of noticing a problem in yourself or someone else is always drinking or drunk for long periods of time. However there are other signs that may also show a person is under the influence or drinking regularly:

Physical

- Loss or increase in appetite, change in eating habits, unexplained weight loss or gain
- Slowed or staggered walking, bumping into things, falls
- Smell of alcohol on breath
- Slow or slurred speech
- Irregular sleep patterns, having difficulty sleeping, awake at unusual times
- Excessive talking, hyperactivity

Behaviour

- Changes in overall attitude or personality with no other reason
- Changes in friends, avoiding old friends, friends who are known alcohol users
- Changes in habits at home, loss of interest in family and family activities
- Can't pay attention, forgetting things
- Not motivated to do anything, has no energy or self-esteem
- Moody, has sudden outbursts, irritated
- Paranoid
- Feels the need to keep things private - hiding bottles of alcohol, lying, refusing to say where they are going
- Unexplained need for money, stealing money and/or items
- Drinking alcohol alone, early in the morning, and often drunk for long periods of time
- Experiencing blackouts after drinking alcohol e.g. unable to remember what happened when drunk

UNDERSTANDING UNITS

There is no guaranteed safe level of drinking. Drinking regularly more than the low risk guidelines can damage your health in both the short and long term. However, if you are drinking, it is recommended to **not regularly drink more than 14 units per week - this is the same for both men and women.**

14 units is the equivalent of:

- 6 pints of low-strength lager/beer or,
- a bottle and a half of 12% wine or,
- half a bottle of spirits (75cl)

It is also recommended to spread the units evenly across the week rather than drinking all at once.

Alcohol and its effects vary from person to person. It is important to remember that if you have health problems or use medications (including over-the-counter such as Paracetamol and Ibuprofen), they can affect how much you are able to drink.

Units of alcohol can be difficult to fully understand and measure, so it's better to think of units as alcoholic drinks.

- Can of lager/beer/cider = 2 units / 440ml ABV 4.5%
- Bottle of lager/beer/cider = 1.7 units / 330ml ABV 5%
- Alcopop = 1.4 units / 275ml ABV 5%
- Pint lower strength lager/beer/cider = 2 units / 568ml (pint) ABV 3.6%
- Pint higher strength lager/beer/cider = 3 units / 568ml ABV 5.2%
- Large glass white/red/rose wine = 3 units / 250ml ABV 12%
- Standard glass white/red/rose wine = 2.1 units / 175ml ABV 12%
- Small glass white/red/rose wine = 1.5 units / 125ml ABV 12%
- Glass prosecco/champagne = 1.5 units / 125ml ABV 12%
- Single small shot of spirits = 1 unit / 25ml ABV 40%



Sourced from Alcohol Focus Scotland

CUTTING DOWN

There are lots of ways to drink less alcohol and feel the benefits on your health from cutting down.

- Eat something before you have a drink - it will slow down the absorption of the alcohol into your body
- Have 2-3 alcohol-free days a week
- Use smaller glasses or a unit measuring cup - at home it is harder to measure how much you are drinking
- Avoid topping up your glass
- Set a timescale for each drink to make it last longer e.g. one pint for the whole night
- Have a soft drink or water with, or after, each alcoholic drink
- Try focusing on your hobbies, interests, and social opportunities that don't involve alcohol
- Have food before and during drinking
- Check the strength of your drink (abv %) - brands can vary
- Set a budget for a night out and stick to it

Low-risk drinking guidelines

 Men and women should not regularly drink more than **14 units per week**

Maximum 14 units per week

14 units is the equivalent of



6 pints of beer (4% abv, 568ml) **or** **6 glasses of wine** (13% abv, 175ml) **or** **14 shots of a spirit** (40% abv, 25ml)

Avoid alcohol when pregnant or trying to conceive

It's best to spread this evenly across the week rather than drinking all at once. Having several alcohol-free days each week is a good way to cut down.

Reducing harm caused by alcohol
www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk

 Alcohol Focus SCOTLAND

• Sourced from Alcohol Focus Scotland

OVERDOSE

People can overdose on alcohol and they will need help immediately.

Signs

- Confusion
- Loss of coordination
- Vomiting
- Seizures
- Irregular breathing (a gap of more than 10 seconds between breaths)
- Slow breathing (less than eight breaths per minute)
- Pale or blue tinged skin
- Low body temperature (hypothermia)
- Unconsciousness or passing out

Response

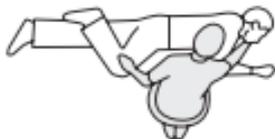
- Call an ambulance - tell the operator your location, and stay on the line
- Keep the person warm
- If you can't get a response or the person is unconscious, put them in the recovery position. Do not leave them on their back.
- If the person is awake, try to keep them in a sitting position and awake
- Be prepared to give CPR if the person stops breathing before an ambulance arrives
- If muscle spasms or seizures occur, remove anything near them that might cause injury

The Recovery Position

Support face Place the arm nearest to you at right angles to the body. Place their other hand against their cheek.



Lift Leg Get hold of the far leg just above the knee and pull it up, keeping the foot flat on the ground.



Roll over Keep their hand pressed against their cheek and pull on the upper leg to roll them towards you and onto their side.



DO NOT

- Leave the person to sleep it off
- Give them coffee (dehydration)
- Make them sick
- Walk them around
- Put them in a cold shower (hypothermia)
- Let them drink more alcohol

**Are you worried about
someone's substance use?**

**Contact our helpline for
information and support**

08080 10 10 11

helpline@sfad.org.uk

webchat online www.sfad.org.uk

 **@ScotFamADrugs**

 **@ScottishFamiliesAffectedByDrugs**

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Recognised Scottish Charity SC034737





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Information in this booklet is sourced from Alcohol Focus Scotland, International Overdose Awareness Day and Drink Wise Age Well

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