

# Alcohol: harmful use of alcohol

## What is 'problem drinking'?

People are said to be dependent on alcohol when it is affecting their physical health and social life yet they do not seem to be prepared to stop drinking to solve their problems.

For men, excessive drinking is more than 4 standard drinks of alcohol a day.

For women, drinking becomes a problem at lesser amounts—2 standard drinks a day.

High-risk or harmful drinking occurs at more than 6 drinks a day for men and 4 drinks a day for women.

## Measuring your alcohol intake

One standard drink contains 10 g of alcohol, which is in 1 middy (or pot) of standard beer (285 mL), 2 middies of low-alcohol beer or 5 middies of super-light beer. These are equal in alcohol content to 1 small glass of table wine (120 mL), 1 glass of sherry or port (60 mL) or 1 nip of spirits (30 mL).

1 stubby or can of beer = 1.3 standard drinks

1 750 mL bottle of beer = 2.6 standard drinks

1 750 mL bottle of wine = 6 standard drinks



Standard drinks

## The 0.05 level

To keep below 0.05 blood alcohol level, a 70 kg man or woman should not exceed:

2 standard drinks in 1 hour

3 standard drinks in 2 hours

4 standard drinks in 3 hours

## What are the risks?

Heavy drinking damages the body; it may damage all the organs of the body, but will especially damage the liver, stomach, heart and brain. It will cause high blood pressure, gout and pancreatitis (inflamed pancreas). One serious effect is that some drinkers have blackouts of memory; others have blackouts during heavy drinking bouts only. At least 15% of all patients admitted to hospital have an alcohol-related illness and about 50% of fatal traffic accidents involve alcohol. It is a special problem for pregnant women, whose babies can be abnormal: more than 1 drink a day places the baby at risk.

Alcohol also interacts badly with many prescribed medicines, especially sedatives.

## How can you get help?

If you experience problems related to drinking in yourself, cut down on the amount and frequency of social drinking. If you find this impossible, seek help without delay—you cannot fight it alone. When you attempt to stop, withdrawal symptoms may be a problem.

Get in touch with your family doctor or your nearest branch of Alcoholics Anonymous or Alanon. Some cities have direct telephone drug and alcohol services. The only way to solve the problem is to realise you have one, admit to it and then do something about it. Experience has shown that the key to success is to quit altogether, and for this reason the help of your family, your doctor and a caring organisation such as Alcoholics Anonymous is essential.

### Golden rules to avoid hazardous drinking

- Do not drink daily.
- Aim for less than 12 drinks per week for men and 8 for women.
- Have at least 3 non-drinking days per week.
- Change to low-alcohol beer.
- Avoid drinking on an empty stomach.
- Avoid high-risk situations (e.g. constant parties).
- Mix alcoholic with non-alcoholic drinks.

## What are the symptoms?

The possible symptoms or signs are as follows:

<i><b>Adverse psychological and social effects</b></i>	<i><b>Physical effects</b></i>
loss of self-esteem	brain damage (if severe)
irritability	depression
devious behaviour	insomnia—nightmares
anxiety	hypertension
paranoia	heart disease
stress	liver disease
relationship breakdown	dyspepsia (indigestion)
poor work performance	stomach ulcers
financial problems	sexual dysfunction
accidents	hand tremor
driving offences	peripheral nerve damage
crime—violence	gout
personal neglect	obesity