

# Alcohol Harm Reduction



SUSU Advice  
Centre



## ALCOHOL HARM REDUCTION

Alcohol is one of the most used drugs in the UK.

It affects individuals differently, depending on when and where you drink, who you're with, and how you feel.

### HOW ALCOHOL MAKES YOU FEEL DEPENDS ON LOTS OF THINGS:

- **How quickly you drink it**

Your liver processes alcohol at a steady rate no matter how quickly you drink. Drinking quickly increases the levels of alcohol in your bloodstream, making you drunker, faster.

- **How recently you've eaten**

Food helps slow down the speed that alcohol is released into your system.

- **Your mood before drinking**

If you feel a bit down before drinking, it may make you feel even more depressed. If you feel angry, it can make you aggressive.

- **Sex**

Women's bodies contain less water than men's, so alcohol is less diluted, meaning women feel the effects more than men. This is particularly true either just before or during a period.

### KNOW YOUR UNITS

This section contains advice on units, the term used to describe the amount of alcohol, and therefore the strength of your drink.



## GOVERNMENT GUIDELINES

### Government recommended safe drinking limits

Unit guidelines are the same for men and women. Both are advised not to regularly drink more than 14 units a week.

### Approximate units for popular drinks

Can of lager | 500ml Normal strength | 2 units

Bottle of strong lager | 330ml | 2 units

Bottle of alcopops | 275ml | 1.4 units

Pint of lager | 568ml Normal strength | 2 units

Shot (Tequila, Sambuca etc) | 35ml | 1.3 units

Bottle of wine | 750ml | 9 units

Glass of Wine | 125ml | 1.5 units

Spirits (Vodka Whiskey etc.) | 35ml | 1.4 units

If you drink up to 14 units a week, spread them over a few days and include drink-free days.

## DRINKING OVER LIMITS: SHORT-TERM NEGATIVE EFFECTS

- **Low energy**
- **Accidents**
- **Injuries or violence**
- **Unplanned sexual encounters**
- **Problems with friends and families**

## DRINKING OVER LIMITS: LONG-TERM NEGATIVE EFFECTS

- **Alcohol dependence**
- **High blood pressure**
- **Liver disease**
- **Cancer**



## SPOTTING THE WARNING SIGNS

Different people react in different ways to alcohol. For some people, alcohol helps them relax and enjoy social occasions; for others, it might damage their health and personal life.

## SIGNS THAT YOU'RE DEVELOPING AN UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP WITH ALCOHOL:

- **Finding it difficult to stop drinking once you've started.**
- **Neglecting academic work or employment.**
- **People close to you worrying about the amount you drink.**
- **You're taking risks when you've had a drink, such as driving a car or getting into fights.**
- **Drinking more than five days a week and more than nine units each time.**
- **You're regularly thinking about when you can have your next drink.**
- **Being unable to enjoy yourself or relax without alcohol Getting involved in violence.**

If any of the above apply to you, you should consider cutting down. If a few of these apply to you, contact your GP for help and advice, or contact any of the organisations below.

## THE RISKS

- **Getting hooked on alcohol**

Regular use of alcohol can lead to tolerance: having to drink more and more to get the same effect. This can lead to physical dependence.



- **Mixing alcohol and other drugs**

Mixing alcohol with other drugs, particularly depressants like sleeping tablets or heroin, is risky. The combination produces effects which are difficult to predict and can lead to an increased risk of passing out or death.

- **Overdose**

Alcohol slows down breathing and heart rate. In large enough quantities, it can lead to loss of consciousness and even death.

### **Signs of alcohol overdose**

- Slow, shallow, or irregular breathing
- Confusion Difficulty awakening the person
- No reaction from painful stimuli (such as pinching)
- Unconsciousness (passing out)
- Blue-tinged skin or pale skin Seizures

If a person displays any of these symptoms, lie them on their side so they don't choke if they're sick, and call 999.

- **Drink Driving**

Driving while drunk or being in a car with a drunk driver is very dangerous both for you and other people in the car. You, your friends, or a pedestrian could be seriously hurt or killed.

## **STAYING SAFE**

- **Passing Out**

As already mentioned, it's possible to overdose on alcohol which can be fatal. If someone you're with passes out, turn them onto their side so they can't choke on their vomit and ring an ambulance or find someone to help you.

- **Space your drinks out**

Use soft drinks or water between alcoholic drinks. Your night will last longer, and it will stop you from getting dehydrated and reduce the effects of a hangover.



- **Don't drink on empty stomach**

Food slows the release of alcohol into your system and helps to limit how quickly the alcohol affects you. Eating a meal before you go out or a snack while you drink is a good idea. You'll have more energy to enjoy yourself!

- **Have the day off**

Give your liver a chance to 'detox' by having at least two alcohol-free days a week – this way, it has time to recover and repair itself.

- **Try to stick to one type of drink**

Avoid mixing your drinks. This'll help you keep track of how many units you've had and avoid mixing different strength drinks.

## GETTING HELP

If you feel your drinking is getting out of hand, consider talking to someone. Maybe a close friend, parent, teacher, or The Advice Centre - [advice@susu.org](mailto:advice@susu.org)

- **Talk to Frank**

National drugs awareness site for young people and parents/carers.

0800 77 66 00

[www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com)

- **Addaction**

UK - wide treatment agency, helping individuals, families and communities to manage the effects of drug and alcohol misuse.

[www.addaction.org.uk](http://www.addaction.org.uk)

- **Brook**

Free, confidential advice on sex for young people.

Call 0800 185 023

or visit [www.brook.org.uk](http://www.brook.org.uk)

