



Making a change

Positive steps to
change your drinking



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Why is your doctor or health care professional talking to you about alcohol?

The past 50 years has seen a big increase in the amount of alcohol we are drinking. In the UK, alcohol consumption has almost doubled since 1991 and, as a result, there have been more cases of accidents, injuries and health problems caused by alcohol.

Drinking more than the recommended drinking limits can affect your health and make you more likely to be involved in an accident or to be a victim of crime.

Drinking too much can also cause social problems and can have a negative effect on families and communities.

GPs, Accident & Emergency departments and other healthcare services are working with the public to increase awareness of alcohol-related problems and to encourage everyone to enjoy the benefits of drinking less.

This booklet offers practical advice to help you change your drinking habits.

One in three divorces cite excessive drinking by a partner as a contributory factor.

There were 2,365 alcohol-related deaths in Scotland in 2007.

Choosing change

Even small changes to your drinking behaviour can make a difference to your health in the long term. It is important that you take responsibility for changing the amount and the way you drink. You must make changes because you want to and believe you can.

Around 50% of people who committed suicide in the last ten years had a history of alcohol misuse.

How much is too much?

It is estimated that approximately 50% of men and 30% of women are regularly drinking more than the recommended limits. The recommended drinking limits have been set by the UK Department of Health and are based upon medical and scientific evidence of the short- and long-term effects of alcohol. Alcohol can increase your risk of injury and health problems and have other adverse effects, even when you think it isn't harming you.

Drinking limits



It is recommended that **women** do not drink more than 2-3 units per day (and no more than 14 units per week). Women who are pregnant or trying to conceive should avoid drinking alcohol.



It is recommended that **men** do not drink more than 3-4 units per day (and no more than 21 units per week).

Everyone should have at least two alcohol-free days a week.

What is a unit?

1 unit = 10ml of pure alcohol, the number of units of alcohol in a drink depends on the size and strength of drink.



1 pint of normal strength lager (4% abv) =

2.2

units of alcohol



330ml bottle of medium strength beer (5% abv) =

1.7

units of alcohol



250ml (large) glass of wine (12.5% abv) =

3.1

units of alcohol



175ml (standard) glass of wine (12.5% abv) =

2.2

units of alcohol



1 standard measure of spirit 25ml (40% abv) =

1

unit of alcohol



750ml bottle of wine (12.5% abv) =

9.4

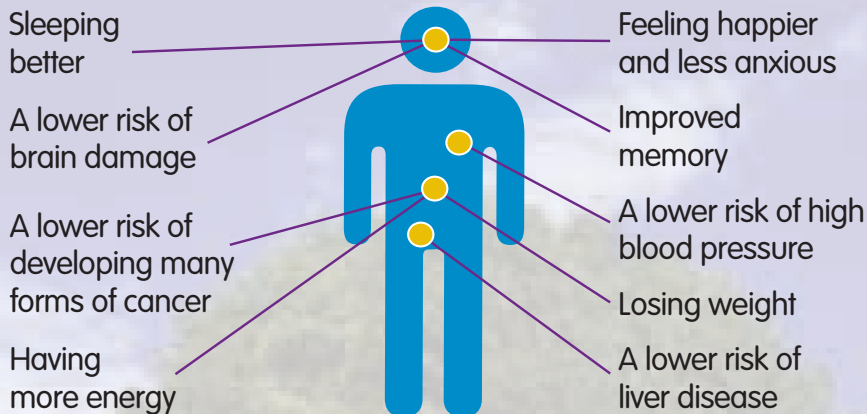
units of alcohol

The enclosed Drinks Calculator (on page 15) will help you to work out how many units are in your favourite drinks.

It takes an hour for your body to process one unit of alcohol.

What are the benefits of change?

Cutting down the amount of alcohol you drink is good for your body and can make a difference to the way you feel. Some of the benefits people find when they drink less include:



Cutting down may have other benefits, some of which may be relevant to you including:

- A lower risk of accident or injury.
- Less chance of getting involved in fights.
- A lower risk of drink driving.
- Developing better relationships.
- Feeling more positive about yourself.
- Having more time for other interests.
- Being more successful at work, or improving the possibility of getting, and staying in, employment.
- Saving money, either through purchasing less alcohol or potential for increased earnings.

There is some research which suggests that, in middle-aged people who drink already, there may even be some benefits from drinking small amounts, for example in the prevention of coronary heart disease. For middle-aged men, drinking one or two units of alcohol a day may help prevent this disease and for women, drinking one or two units of alcohol a week may also be beneficial as coronary heart disease is more common in post-menopausal women. However, non-drinkers and infrequent drinkers should not increase their drinking.

Building confidence and making a change

You have decided you want to change the amount and the way you drink, this is a positive step forward.

Try to think about a time in the past when you have successfully made changes in your life (for example, giving up smoking or losing weight). Are there any techniques that worked for you that you could use now?

Think about the positive steps you have already taken. Make a note of them here. Remember, recognising that you are ready for change and taking the first step can be the hardest part.

It is useful to have someone you feel can give you support when making a lifestyle change. Is there anyone you know in a similar situation who has been successful? Who else can offer you support? Again, make a note here of what you can do to get the support you need.

Small steps

Even small changes to the amount you drink, what you drink and when you drink can help you reduce the amount of alcohol you consume overall. Tick the following that are relevant to you and would work for you.

Drink on fewer occasions

- ☐ Work out why you drink and plan to do something else instead.
- ☐ Plan ahead each week which days you will avoid alcohol, you should have at least two alcohol-free days a week.
- ☐ Save the money that you would have spent on alcohol and treat yourself.
- ☐ Get involved in social activities that don't revolve around alcohol.

Drink fewer alcoholic drinks

- ☐ Pace yourself – plan how long you will be out and how many drinks you will have and stick to your plan.
- ☐ Switch between alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks and remember if you are drinking in a round, try to avoid having an alcoholic drink every round.
- ☐ Try to drink at the same pace as a slower-drinking friend.
- ☐ At home, don't finish the bottle – keep some for another day.
- ☐ Occupy yourself – don't just drink but participate in other activities, for example, darts, bowling, reading, talking or eating.

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You have decided you want to change the way you drink, this is a positive step forward.

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Reduce the amount of alcohol in each drink

- ☐ Switch from a higher alcohol content to a lower one, for example, from medium strength lager (5%) to normal strength lager (4%).
- ☐ Introduce some drinking 'rules', for example, don't drink before 8pm.
- ☐ Switch to smaller measures:
 - from a large glass of wine (250ml) to a standard glass (175ml)
 - from pints to bottles of beer
 - use a smaller glass at home
 - use a spirit measure at home.

Make a note of other techniques that may work for you

Keeping track of change

Changing habits can be a slow process. Setting yourself shorter-term goals which are easier to achieve will keep you motivated.

Try keeping track of your progress, possibly using a drinks diary. A drinks diary can be used to record what you are drinking, when you are drinking and why you are drinking. It is a good way to keep track of the amount of alcohol you drink over a week and to identify the times you are most likely to drink.

You can use the enclosed Drinks Calculator (on page 15) to work out how many units you are drinking and record them in your drinks diary.



Drinks diary

Day	Where	What	Units	Total
Grand total for the week				

Staying motivated

There will be times when you find it difficult to stick to your plans for cutting down the amount you drink. It might help to identify these situations in advance so you can come up with ways to cope with them.

Don't worry if your attempts to change don't work the first time. Going back to old drinking habits can be triggered by stressful events or circumstances. Don't feel guilty or lose confidence, see this as part of the process of change and learn from it. If you can, work out why it happened, and if it was an event or particular situation, is it possible to avoid this in future?

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Coping with difficult situations: planning ahead

Look ahead to the next few weeks and list all of the social situations or events where there may be pressure to drink. Think of the people, places or situations where that pressure is likely to be the strongest. Think about ways you can avoid this pressure.

Try to think of situations when your mood might influence how much you drink and think of ways to cope, for example, listening to particular music or making a phone call. If possible, try to prevent the situation happening.

Realise that slip-ups are common and that one slip doesn't mean failure. It is important to get back on track as soon as possible. You may be disappointed or frustrated, but focus on building your confidence and your determination.

You can use this space to make a note of things to help you plan for difficult situations

On the back of this booklet you will find a list of organisations and resources that can help you or support you to cut down the amount you are drinking.



Further information/support

If you are concerned about your own drinking, or that of a family member, you can seek advice from your doctor or other health professional or the following services:

NHS 24

www.nhs24.com/alcohol

Find out more about ways to cut down your drinking, try the 'My Drinking' questionnaire, find local/national services and access related articles and websites.

InfoScotland.com

www.infoscotland.com/alcohol

Find out more about the short- and long-term effects of alcohol on your health and relationships.

Drinkline

Telephone: 0800 917 8282

Drinkline is an advice and information line for anyone who wants more information about alcohol, local services that can help or simply to talk about drinking and alcohol issues.

Alcohol Focus Scotland

www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk

Alcohol Focus Scotland provides information and training on alcohol issues, raising awareness of alcohol-related problems, and working to influence national alcohol policy.