

A fresh approach

Helping you to make positive choices
about the amount you drink



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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. In Scotland, 50% of men and 30% of women are drinking more than the recommended amounts.

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

Healthcare services are working with the public to raise awareness

of alcohol-related problems and to encourage everyone to enjoy the benefits of drinking less.

This booklet is designed to encourage you to think about your own drinking and to help you decide if you are happy with your current drinking habits. It provides up to date information about the benefits of drinking less that not everyone may be aware of, and encourages you to make up your own mind about what is right for you. It is important that if you decide to make a change to your drinking behaviour it is because you want to and believe you can.

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.

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



How much is too much?

Although lots of people enjoy a drink many are regularly drinking more than the recommended drinking levels, often without knowing it. This increases risk of injury or health problems. Alcohol can have adverse effects, even when you think it isn't harming you. 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.

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 11) 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?

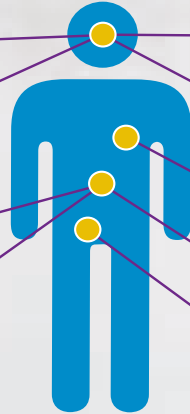
Cutting down the amount of alcohol you drink is good for your body and can make a difference to the way you feel. Some of the benefits people find when they drink less include:

Sleeping better

A lower risk of brain damage

A lower risk of developing many forms of cancer

Having more energy



Feeling happier and less anxious

Improved memory

A lower risk of high blood pressure

Losing weight

A lower risk of liver disease

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.

A close-up photograph of a man and a woman looking at a laptop screen together. The man is on the left, wearing a blue beanie and a dark blue sweater, looking down at the screen. The woman is on the right, wearing a brown beanie and a purple top, looking up at the screen with a slight smile. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a paved area and some greenery.

Why cut down?

Drinking too much alcohol can affect your health, your job, your family and your relationships. Some people find drinking too much can lead to:

- Relationship problems.
- Unsafe sex.
- Money problems.
- Making mistakes or having accidents at work or taking time off because you are hungover.

It may also cause health problems including:

- Anxiety, panic attacks and depression.
- Memory loss and forgetfulness.
- Stomach problems including indigestion, diarrhoea and pancreatitis.
- Liver problems such as cirrhosis of the liver.
- Infertility.
- Strokes and various types of cancer.

Thinking about change

Change is not always easy. It can be difficult to cut down the amount you drink when people around you aren't changing their drinking habits. It can also be confusing working out the number of units of alcohol you are drinking. When you first cut down the amount you drink you may feel less sociable and relaxed. However, there are also advantages that you may not even have thought of (see *What are the benefits of change* on page 6).

Using a pros and cons list is a good way to help you decide if you want to reduce the amount you drink. The list should contain things that matter to you. Look at the benefits listed on page 6, which of these matter to you? Write them in the pros and cons grid opposite. What about the risks of drinking? If any of these worry you, include them in the grid too. Use the questions to help you fill in the pros and cons grid.

When you have completed the grid, think about where that leaves you. If you feel you might consider changing your drinking, have a look at the *Options for change* on page 10 and see what might work for you. You may decide after listing the pros and cons that you are not ready to change your drinking habits. You will know best if and when you are ready to make a change.



If you want more information about, or support with, cutting down the amount you drink, remember you can talk to a health professional such as a GP or nurse, who can give you advice and help to cut down. There are other sources of help and information listed on the back of this leaflet.

Pros and cons of cutting down your drinking

Advantages of current drinking

- What do you enjoy about your drinking right now?
- How does this make you feel?

Disadvantages of current drinking

- Is there anything that is not so good about your drinking at the moment?
- What impact does this have?

Disadvantages of change

- What would be the worst thing about changing what/how you drink?
- What effect would this have?
- What other negative aspects would there be?

Benefits of change

- What would be the benefits of changing your drinking habits?
- What difference would this make to you?
- What other advantages might there be?

Options for change

Making 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. Here are some simple changes that will make a big difference to your drinking levels. 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.

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.



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.