



Have a **little less,**

feel a lot **better**

Facts **about alcohol**

**drinkaware**

# How much alcohol is too much?

Guidance from the UK Chief Medical Officers is that to keep the risks from alcohol to a low level it is safest not to drink more than 14 units a week on a regular basis. If you regularly drink as much as 14 units a week, it's best to spread your units evenly over three days or more.<sup>1</sup>

## What is a unit?

Because alcoholic drinks come in different strengths and sizes, units are a way to tell how strong your drink is. One unit is 10ml or 8g of pure alcohol. The chart shown here illustrates how many units are in different types of drinks.



**1.6**  
units

**1 bottle (330ml)  
of premium beer**  
based on 5% ABV



**2.3**  
units

**1 pint of beer**  
based on 4% ABV



**2.6**  
units

**1 pint of cider**  
based on 4.5% ABV



**1**  
unit

**1 glass of 25ml  
measured spirits**  
based on 40% ABV



**1.1**  
units

**1 bottle (275ml)  
of alcopop**  
based on 4% ABV



**2.3**  
units

**1 medium (175ml)  
glass of wine**  
based on 13% ABV

# How can alcohol affect your health?

Alcohol affects your body in a number of ways and can impact both your short and long term health.

If you do choose to drink, you can keep the health risks from alcohol low by drinking within the guidelines and if you understand some of the key facts about alcohol you will be more able to make informed choices about your drinking.

If you regularly drink more than 14 units per week, you may have noticed some of the following effects of alcohol already:

- Putting on weight<sup>2</sup>
- Poor quality sleep<sup>3</sup>
- Impact on sex life and/or difficulty getting an erection<sup>4</sup>
- Low mood<sup>5</sup>

The risk of developing a range of health problems increases the more alcohol you drink on a regular basis. Health risks include:

- Liver cirrhosis<sup>6</sup>
- Stroke<sup>7</sup>
- Cancer of the mouth, throat, oesophagus or larynx<sup>8</sup>
- Breast cancer<sup>9</sup>
- Heart disease and high blood pressure<sup>10</sup>
- Impotence<sup>11</sup>

## Big benefits from small changes

The good news is, if you make a few small changes to your drinking, and cut out just one or two each time you drink it could make a real difference to your health.

Cutting down doesn't necessarily mean giving up, even by just having 1 or 2 less each time you drink you'll probably notice some benefits after just a few weeks.

- Feeling better in the mornings
- Feeling less tired during the day
- You may stop gaining weight, or lose some pounds

## Pregnancy and drinking

If you are pregnant, or think you could become pregnant, the safest approach is not to drink alcohol at all. Drinking during pregnancy can lead to long-term harm to the baby, and this risk increases the more you drink.

But please be aware if you're already pregnant and drank only small amounts of alcohol, the risk of harm to the baby is low. However if you are worried, you should talk to your GP or midwife.<sup>12</sup>

## Top tips to help you cut back

There are many different ways you can cut back on your drinking, below are some suggestions:

- Having several drink-free days can help you to break the habit and reduce the number of units you drink in a week – but it's good to remember that having a day off doesn't compensate for having an extra drink on another day!
- Try drinking one or two less on a night out or an evening in, by swapping the occasional alcoholic drink for a soft drink, topping up wine with soda or beer with lemonade.
- Go for lower strength drinks or choose smaller drinks e.g. swap a pint for a smaller bottle or a half pint.

There are lots of ideas and advice to help you drink less. Visit **[www.drinkaware.co.uk/little-less](http://www.drinkaware.co.uk/little-less)** for tools and apps you can download to track your drinking.



# What can I do next?

- **Want to find out more about how having a little less can make a big difference to you?**

Use our online tool to find out more about how you can cut back and feel better:

[www.drinkaware.co.uk/little-less](http://www.drinkaware.co.uk/little-less)



- **Keep track of your units**

Download our free *Drinkaware: Track and Calculate Units* app to track your drinking. You can download the app from the App Store or Google Play.

- **Want to find out more about alcohol and your health?**

We have a range of information, videos and tools on our website to help you find out more about alcohol and your health. Visit our website to find out more:

[www.drinkaware.co.uk](http://www.drinkaware.co.uk)

If you are concerned about your own or someone else's drinking you can get confidential, **free help and advice by:**

- Contacting your **GP**
- **Calling Drinkline on 0300 123 1110** – a free, confidential helpline
- Finding local alcohol services at :  
[www.nhs.uk/Livewell/alcohol/Pages/Alcoholsupport.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/alcohol/Pages/Alcoholsupport.aspx)

If you are unable to access any of the below references, please contact the Drinkaware research team for more information: [contact@drinkaware.co.uk](mailto:contact@drinkaware.co.uk)

<sup>1</sup> UK Chief Medical Officers (2016) UK Chief Medical Officers' Low Risk Drinking Guidelines.

<sup>2</sup> Traversy, G. & Chaput, J.-P. (2015) Alcohol consumption and obesity: An update. *Current obesity reports*, 4, 122-130.

<sup>3</sup> Roehrs, T. & Roth, T. (2001) Sleep, sleepiness, and alcohol use. *Alcohol Research and Health*, 25, 101-109.

<sup>4</sup> Peugh, J. & Belenko, S. (2001) Alcohol, Drugs and Sexual Function: A Review. *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 33, 223-232.

<sup>5</sup> Bellos, S., Skapinakis, P., Rai, D. et al. (2013) 'Cross-cultural patterns of the association between varying levels of alcohol consumption and the common mental disorders of depression and anxiety: Secondary analysis of the WHO Collaborative Study on Psychological Problems in General Health Care', *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 133: 825-831.

<sup>6</sup> Savolainen, V. T., Liesto, K., Männikkö, A. et al. (1993) Alcohol Consumption and Alcoholic Liver Disease: Evidence of a Threshold Level of Effects of Ethanol. *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*, 17, 1112-1117.

<sup>7</sup> Xin, X., He, J., Frontini, M. et al. (2001) Effects of alcohol reduction on blood pressure: A meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials. *Hypertension*, 38(5), 1112-1117.

<sup>8</sup> Bagnardi, V., Rota, M., Botteri, E. et al. (2015) Alcohol consumption and site-specific cancer risk: a comprehensive dose-response meta-analysis. *British Journal of Cancer*, 112, 580-593.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*

<sup>10</sup> Roerecke, M. & Rehm, J. (2010) Irregular heavy drinking occasions and risk of ischemic heart disease: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 171, 633-644.

<sup>11</sup> Anderson, K., Nissenblat, V. & Norman, R. (2010) Lifestyle factors in people seeking infertility treatment—a review. *Australian and New Zealand journal of obstetrics and gynaecology*, 50, 8-20.

<sup>12</sup> UK Chief Medical Officers (2016) UK Chief Medical Officers' Low Risk Drinking Guidelines.