

Drinking, you and
your mates

NHS

Home Office

**HOW DOES
YOUR
NIGHT
END?**

**ALCOHOL
KNOW YOUR
LIMITS**

HOW DOES ALCOHOL AFFECT YOU?

For many of us, drinking alcohol is a part of life. But how much do you know about how alcohol affects your body, or how being drunk can affect people around us? How does your night end?

This leaflet will help you make choices about how much you drink. It tells you how alcohol can affect you, explains how you can stay safe when drinking and what to do if someone is in trouble after drinking too much. It's not about stopping drinking, but it's about making you aware of what some of the consequences could be of regular binge drinking and making sure alcohol plays a more positive part in your day-to-day life.

DRINKING AND YOU

A few drinks at the weekend. You and your mates are out in town, having a laugh – anything could happen. That might be closer to the truth than you think. If you drink to get drunk, or drink more heavily than you're used to, you can't be sure what the effects could be.

YOUR DRINKING CHOICES

Regularly drinking more than the recommended amount of daily units or rapidly drinking too much in one go both have their risks.

It is recommended that you should not regularly drink more than: 3–4 units of alcohol a day for men, 2–3 units of alcohol a day for women. 'Regularly' means drinking every day or most days of the week.

If you drink more than this, the risks to your health and personal safety start to increase – especially if you regularly drink large amounts over a short period of time. Pregnant women and women trying to conceive should avoid alcohol altogether and never drink more than 1–2 units once or twice a week.



**WOULD
YOU TRASH
THE PLACE
IF THEY GOT
YOUR ORDER
WRONG?**

If you cause harassment whilst drunk you risk being made the subject of an anti-social behaviour order.

IT'S WHAT'S INSIDE THAT COUNTS

Drink Saturday night. Sleep it off Sunday morning. If drink was having a bad effect on your life, you'd know it, wouldn't you? Not necessarily. Heavy drinking affects you now and in the future. And you might not be able to tell right now what harm you're doing.

If you do find you've overdone it, keep off the booze for 48 hours to give your body time to recover and to minimise the risk of future harm.

It takes your liver an hour to process one unit of alcohol. So if you're having two or three drinks an hour, you're overloading your system and your health could suffer. In the shorter term, you may find yourself thrown out of the pub, in trouble with the police or making a visit to A&E to get patched up.

AVOIDING GETTING TOO DRUNK

- eat before you go out
- drink water regularly and before you go to bed after a night out
- alternate alcoholic drinks with soft drinks or water
- don't try to keep up with friends who drink more than you
- try to avoid buying drinks in rounds
- if possible, sit down whilst you drink – you will drink less than you would standing up
- use more mixers – diluting a drink with another mixer will make it last longer and lessen the effects
- don't mix alcohol with drugs – especially ecstasy or cocaine – it can be deadly
- if you're on medication, ask your doctor if it's okay to drink


The effects of alcohol build up in your body over time. So if you regularly drink more than the recommended daily amount, you could be setting yourself up for long-term health problems.

PROBLEMS YOU CAN'T SEE...

- sexual difficulties such as temporary impotence
- certain types of cancer, especially breast cancer
- memory loss and brain damage
- cirrhosis of the liver
- anxiety, stress, depression, poor concentration
- indigestion

...AND PROBLEMS YOU CAN SEE

If the way you look is important to you, you might want to consider how alcohol affects your appearance. All alcohol is heavy with calories. So the more you drink, the more likely you are to put on weight. Heavy drinking can also take a toll on your looks, give you skin problems and age you before your time.



**WOULD
YOU SQUAT
DOWN AND
PEE INTO THE
GUTTER?**

You can get an £80 fixed penalty for urinating in the street.

YOU WOULDN'T BEHAVE LIKE THAT SOBER

Ever been so drunk that you're not sure how you got home? Or woken up the morning after and regretted making a fool of yourself? Maybe you can't remember what you did. No matter how good a time you're having when you're drinking, it's important to put the health and safety of you and your friends first. Plan ahead and keep within sensible levels of drinking to stay in control on a night out.

WHAT ARE THEY LAUGHING AT?

The more you drink, the easier it is to cross the line between being funny and being annoying. You might think that you're the life and soul of the party, but can you be sure everybody's laughing with you and not at you?

AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR

You might think you can control yourself, but you can't control how others behave when they're drunk. Young men are particularly vulnerable to violent attacks by other people who've been drinking. If you know you become aggressive when you drink, keep within your limits.

DID YOU KNOW?

Caffeine is a stimulant. Having a cup of coffee might make you feel more alert, but it does not make you sober.

SEX

That person you're pulling might look gorgeous after you've had a few drinks. But what about in the morning? And can you be sure you'll use a condom? Unprotected sex can lead to unintended pregnancies or sexually transmitted infections like chlamydia, gonorrhoea or HIV. Make sure you're both up for it – If you don't have a firm 'yes' it's legally rape and you could be charged. Women are most at risk from sexual assaults, either from strangers or guys they have met over the course of an evening drinking.

Don't be surprised if you can't perform after a heavy night drinking; alcohol acts as an anaesthetic and makes it harder to achieve an erection or orgasm. Over time, heavy drinking can lead to impotency, smaller genitals and a lower sperm count.

SPIKED DRINKS

Both women and men are at risk of their drinks being spiked. Watch your drink being poured, keep your drink with you and watch out for your friends. Don't accept a drink from someone you don't know and trust and don't share or swap drinks. And if you suddenly feel odd or unusually drunk, ask someone you really trust to get you home safely. Remember, although you need to watch out for drugs, it's more likely someone will sneak vodka into your drink or buy you a double when you ask for a single.

INJURIES

If you're so drunk that you're dizzy or falling over, you could do yourself a serious injury. Pedestrians who are killed or injured in road accidents have often been drinking.

LOSING YOUR STUFF AND GETTING ROBBED

Remember, after a few drinks you're more likely to lose things, particularly money and door keys which can prevent you getting home safely.



**WOULD YOU
GET IN WITH
A MAN
YOU'VE
JUST MET?**

Worse still, you're setting yourself up as easy prey for robbers. Women feel most in danger walking down the street, yet it's blokes who are more likely to get mugged.

KEEPING YOU SAFE

- at the start of an evening, plan how you'll get home – keep enough money to pay for the journey home or agree who will drive and not drink
- don't accept drinks from strangers
- don't leave your drink unattended
- don't get into an unlicensed cab or a stranger's car
- don't get into a car with a driver who's been drinking
- don't leave your friends to go off with someone you don't know
- avoid aggressive drinkers – walk away if someone seems to be getting too rowdy
- avoid walking home alone or through dark, unsafe areas
- if you think you're being followed, cross over the road to see if they follow – if you're still worried don't hang about, get to a public place and call a mate to meet you, or the police

- you won't hear someone come up behind you if you're chatting on your phone or listening to your personal stereo
- if you are attacked, your best bet is to shout and run
- when your instinct says there's trouble ahead, there probably is, so get somewhere safe
- carry a condom – if you have sex, make sure you don't take unnecessary risks.

KEEPING YOUR THINGS SAFE

- keep your belongings with you at all times
- don't leave things like your purse, wallet or keys lying around on the pub table
- keep bags closed, zipped up and buckled
- be extra careful with rucksacks – if someone grabs it, let it go
- don't flash cash around – keep it in your pocket
- if you use a cash machine, choose one that's well lit
- if you take your mobile out with you, keep it hidden and make any calls brief.

OVER THE LIMIT?

There are laws to stop people who are under 18 buying alcohol and to encourage responsible behaviour when you're drinking. So make sure that a night out with your mates doesn't end up with you getting into trouble with the police. Getting a fine or criminal record could also affect your career opportunities or prevent you from entering some countries.

Bear in mind, too, that what you do when you're drunk doesn't just affect you. It affects the friends you're with, the people in the local area and the emergency services who might be called to deal with a situation you get involved in – when they could be helping someone else.

DON'T DRINK AND DRIVE

The advice for drinking and driving is simple – don't do it. Any amount of alcohol in your blood will affect your ability to drive. Even if you think you feel fine. The legal limit for driving is 80mg of alcohol in 100ml of blood. You can't translate that into a number of drinks easily – it depends on factors such as your age, gender, weight and metabolism, so it's much easier to have nothing to drink than to try to calculate how much is safe and risk being over the limit.

DRIVING THE MORNING AFTER

It might not be safe to drive the day after a big night out – alcohol stays in your system for some time. Lots of people have been found to have broken the drink drive laws the day after a drinking session.



Lager pint
2.8 units

ABV 5%



Beer pint
2.3 units

ABV 4%



Cider pint
3.4 units

ABV 6%

The ABV (alcohol by volume) shows what percentage of a drink is pure alcohol – the higher the percentage, the stronger the drink.

WHAT'S AGAINST THE LAW?

Nobody's saying you can't enjoy yourself. But you're much less likely to be a nuisance to other people if you don't get very drunk and if you don't drink more than you know you can handle. If you drink more, what starts off as a laugh could end up with a fine or a night in a police cell – or even a criminal charge.

You can get a £50 fixed penalty for:

- drinking in a pub, bar or restaurant if you're under 18, unless you are 16 or 17 and having a meal
- being drunk in the street
- drinking in a public place that's been designated a 'no alcohol' area.

You can get an £80 fixed penalty for:

- drunken behaviour in a public place
- harassing or distressing somebody while you're drunk
- buying or trying to buy alcohol, if you're under 18
- buying alcohol for other people who are under 18
- vomiting or urinating in the street.

If you are convicted of drink driving, you face:

- a minimum 1 year driving ban
- a fine of up to £5,000
- up to six months in prison
- endorsement of your driving licence for 11 years.

Bar staff who serve you if you're under 18 or drunk might also get an £80 on the spot fine.



Spirit double
50ml measure
2 units

ABV 40%




Alcopop
275ml bottle
1.4 units

ABV 5%



Shot 25ml
measure
1 unit

ABV 40%




**WOULD
YOU PUSH
A MATE
INTO THE
ROAD TO GET
A LAUGH?**

**The more you drink, the
easier it is to cross the
line between funny,
annoying or dangerous.**



**WOULD
YOU SMASH
THIS IN
SOMEONE'S
FACE?**



**Seventy per cent of A&E
admissions between
midnight and 5am may
be alcohol related.**

AVOIDING TROUBLE

If you're out on the town during the weekend and there's trouble, just stay well clear of it. You could get into a fight and finish up seriously injured or worse.

WHO'S PAYING?

Alcohol also makes you do things you normally wouldn't dream of doing – like vandalising or stealing someone else's property. The last thing you want after a good night out is to finish up with a heavy fine.

ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR ORDERS

If you cause harassment, alarm or distress to others you risk being made the subject of an anti-social behaviour order. Although it is a civil order, it is a firm measure to stop the behaviour that led to the order being made. This could involve you being banned from places you like to go to. If you fail to keep to the conditions of the order, you will have committed a criminal offence

and you could go to prison for up to five years. To enforce the order your details could be given to the local community for their protection so they can tell the police or local authority if the terms of the order are broken.

LEARN TO WALK AWAY

The best way to avoid trouble is:

- don't think you have to drink until you're drunk
- don't think you're invincible
- be aware that when drunk you may act more aggressively, which may affect how others behave towards you
- try to talk your way out of potentially violent situations and avoid saying or doing anything aggressive
- don't confront gangs – if you're in this situation get away as fast as you can.

WHEN DOES IT BECOME A PROBLEM?

YOU MIGHT BE DEVELOPING A PROBLEM IF YOU'RE:

- drinking more often or in greater amounts
- not able to stop drinking once you've started
- drinking on your own or feeling guilty about drinking
- getting the shakes in the morning or smelling of drink during the day
- letting people down because of your drinking.

WHAT TO DO IN AN EMERGENCY

If a friend loses consciousness after drinking:

- call 999 and ask for an ambulance
- lie them on their side with their top leg bent towards their chest (recovery position)
- make sure they're breathing and their mouth and airways are clear
- if they stop breathing, do mouth-to-mouth resuscitation
- keep them warm (but not hot) with blankets or a coat.

If someone vomits you should:

- try to keep them sitting up
- lie them in the recovery position if they must lie down
- get help immediately if they begin to choke.



Sparkling wine
175ml glass
1.9 units

ABV 11%



Wine
250ml glass
3 units

ABV 12%



Wine
750ml bottle
9.8 units

ABV 13%

KNOW YOUR UNITS

It's recommended that:

- men should not regularly drink more than 3–4 units of alcohol a day
- women should not regularly drink more than 2–3 units of alcohol a day.

'Regularly' means drinking every day or most days of the week.

'LOW ALCOHOL' DRINKS	Bottle (330ml)	Can (440ml)	Pint (568ml)	Litre
Beer, Lager & Cider at 2%	0.7 units	0.9 units	1.1 units	2 units

BEER, LAGER & CIDER	Bottle (330ml)	Can (440ml)	Pint (568ml)	Litre
4%	1.3 units	1.8 units	2.3 units	4 units
5%	1.7 units	2.2 units	2.8 units	5 units
6%	2 units	2.6 units	3.4 units	6 units

'SUPER-STRENGTH' DRINKS	Bottle (330ml)	Can (440ml)	Pint (568ml)	Litre
Beer, Lager & Cider at 9%	3 units	4 units	5.1 units	9 units

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1.4 units

SPIRITS (38–40%)	Small measure (25ml)	Large measure (35ml)	Small double measure (50ml)	Large double measure (70ml)
Gin, rum, vodka & whisky	1 unit	1.3–1.4 units	1.9–2 units	2.7–2.8 units

SHOTS (38–40%)	Small measure (25ml)	Large measure (35ml)
Tequila & Sambuca	1 unit	1.3–1.4 units

Shots may either be spirits or liqueurs, and are generally drunk very quickly. Different liqueurs can vary considerably in strength – they can be stronger or weaker than this example.

WINE & CHAMPAGNE	Small glass (125ml)	Standard glass (175ml)	Large glass (250ml)	Bottle (750ml)
(red, white, rose or sparkling)				

(red, white, rose or sparkling)

10%	1.25 units	1.75 units	2.5 units	7.5 units
11%	1.4 units	1.9 units	2.8 units	8.3 units
12%	1.5 units	2.1 units	3 units	
13%	1.6 units	2.3 units	3.3 units	9.8 units
14%	1.75 units	2.5 units	3.5 units	10.5 units

FORTIFIED WINE (17.5–20%)	Standard measure (50ml)
Sherry & Port	0.9 – 1 unit

Sherry & Port 0.9 – 1 unit



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