

Chest
Heart &
Stroke
Scotland



ALCOHOL



ESSENTIAL GUIDE

This Essential Guide is about alcohol.

It explains:

- the long-term risks of drinking alcohol
- the recommended weekly limit
- the link between alcohol, your weight and your mood
- signs you may be drinking too much and tips on how to cut down.

Alcohol and your health

Limiting how much alcohol you drink is good for your health. This is because alcohol increases your risk of developing serious health conditions. These include heart disease, stroke, diabetes, chest conditions, cancer and liver disease.

Regularly drinking more than the recommended limit of 14 units of alcohol a week puts you at **three times higher risk of having a stroke.**

How alcohol affects your body

- When you drink alcohol your **heart rate and blood pressure** go up.
- Alcohol affects your **arteries** which makes it harder for your heart to pump blood around your body.
- Too much alcohol can make your **heart beat** in an irregular way. This can increase your chances of developing long-term heart problems.



- Your **liver** helps your blood to clot or become thicker. Alcohol affects your liver and can lead to problems with **blood clotting**. This can increase your risk of stroke.
- Alcohol can increase your **cholesterol level** and affect your **weight**. High cholesterol and being overweight increase your risk of heart disease and stroke.
- Alcohol can weaken your **immune system**. This means you are at higher risk of developing **chest infections**.

How much alcohol is safe to drink?

Drinking any alcohol has some level of risk. There is no safe amount to drink. However, you can lower your risk by staying within the recommended limit.

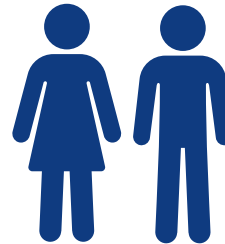


What is the recommended limit?

To keep health risks from alcohol to a low level it is **safest not to drink more than 14 units a week** on a regular basis.

The limit is the same for both men and women.

If you do drink as much as 14 units a week, spread them out over 3 or more days.



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What is a unit?

A unit tells you how much alcohol is in your drink. One unit is the amount of alcohol an average body can process in 1 hour. The number of units in a drink depends on its size and strength.

The label on a bottle or can of alcohol will tell you the 'alcohol by volume' or % ABV. Sometimes this is just called 'vol'. The % ABV value tells you how many units of alcohol are in 1 litre (1000ml) of that drink. For example, 3.8% ABV = 3.8 units of alcohol per litre.

The higher the ABV, the more alcohol is in your drink.

Some alcoholic drinks will include the units of alcohol per serving on their label.

One unit is the same as:



218ml

**Standard
4.5% cider**



76ml

**Standard
13% wine**



25ml

**Standard
40% whisky**



250ml

**Standard
4% beer**



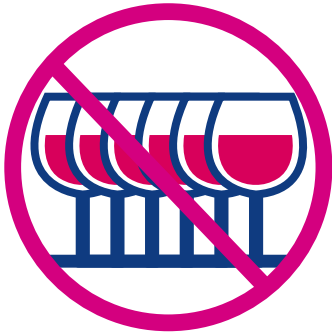
250ml

**Standard
4% alcopop**

What is binge drinking?

Drinking a lot of alcohol on a single occasion is called binge drinking. Binge drinking for men is drinking more than 8 units on a single occasion. Binge drinking for women is drinking more than 6 units on a single occasion.

Binge drinking increases your blood pressure, your risk of having a heart attack and your risk of developing heart disease.



Alcohol and weight

Cutting back on alcohol can help you lose weight. This is because:

- Alcohol is high in 'empty calories'. These are calories that provide your body with energy but none of the vitamins, minerals or nutrients it needs.
- Alcoholic drinks can also have added calories from mixers, sugar, syrup, cream and fruit juice.
- Alcohol increases your appetite. This can lead to snacking and eating more than you should.

Did you know...?



1 pint
of beer

=
calories



1 large slice
of pizza



1 large glass
of wine

=
calories



1 ice-cream

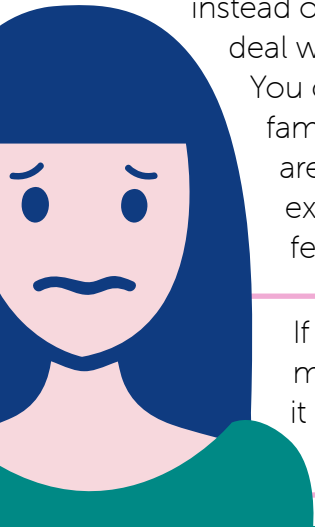
Alcohol and your mood

Some people use alcohol to help them relax and improve their mood. However, because of the way alcohol affects your brain, alcohol is actually a depressant. This means it can make you feel anxious, angry, low or sad. The more you drink, the higher the risk of feeling these negative emotions.

There are lots of things you can do instead of drinking alcohol to help deal with stress and low mood.

You can try talking to a friend or family member about how you are feeling. Exercise is also an excellent way to help you feel better.

If you think your drinking may be affecting your mood, it is important to speak to someone about it.



Signs you may be drinking too much

Your memory is not as good as it was

You drink alcohol when you feel stressed

You have trouble sleeping

You feel low or down a lot of the time

You need to drink more to have the same effect

You often suffer from black-outs and memory loss when drinking

You change or cancel plans because you are drinking or feeling hungover

You think about when you can have your next drink

The benefits of cutting down

Drinking less can have a positive effect on your overall health and wellbeing. Some of the benefits of cutting down include:



Losing weight



Sleeping better



Reducing stress



Avoiding hangovers



Improving your concentration



Saving money



Feeling better about yourself



Reducing the risk of serious health conditions

Tips for cutting down

Choose drinks that contain lower levels of alcohol (a low % ABV or vol).

Drink water at the same time as your alcoholic drink.

Have a non-alcoholic drink in between alcoholic drinks.



Do not use alcohol to quench your thirst – if you are thirsty, drink a non-alcoholic drink.

Sip your drinks slowly rather than gulping or drinking quickly.

Help if you need it

If you think you may be drinking too much and need some support or advice to cut down or stop, there is help available.

Speak to your doctor, get information online at **www.drinkaware.co.uk** or call Drinkline on **0300 123 1110** for free, confidential advice if you are worried about your own drinking or someone else's.



Myths and Facts

-  A small amount of alcohol is good for your health - **MYTH**
-  Alcohol is one of the biggest risk factors for ill health. Any benefits of drinking alcohol are cancelled when all the other health risks are considered. There is no evidence to support recommending drinking to improve health - **FACT**
-  You can 'sober up' with a strong coffee or a cold shower - **MYTH**
-  The only thing that will get rid of the alcohol in your system is time. It takes an average person about 1 hour to process 1 unit of alcohol - **FACT**

-  If you develop a tolerance for alcohol and can 'handle your drink' you can drink more without the bad effects - **MYTH**
-  Tolerance is a warning sign that you are drinking too much. The more you drink, the more damage you are doing to your body - **FACT**
-  If you eat a big meal before you drink, alcohol won't have as much effect - **MYTH**
-  Alcohol affects your body no matter what you eat and how much you eat. Food may delay the effect of alcohol and how quickly it is absorbed into your system but if you drink heavily, you will still get drunk - **FACT**

Our publications are available for free to anyone in Scotland who needs them. Go to www.chss.org.uk/publications for all our resources, including other Essential Guides in this series.

For free, confidential advice and support from our **Advice Line nurses**, call: 0808 801 0899 (Mon-Fri 9.30am-4pm), text: NURSE to 66777 or email: adviceline@chss.org.uk.

Across Scotland, over one million people – that's one in five of us – are living with the effects of a chest, heart or stroke condition. We are here to help everyone who needs us. But we need your support to do this. Go to www.chss.org.uk/supportus to find out how you can help more people in Scotland.

If you would like this resource in an alternative format, please contact our Advice Line nurses.

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NO LIFE HALF LIVED

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