

The facts about...

Alcohol and **your health**



**Five key
things you
need to
know**

for the facts
drinkaware.co.uk

It's the end of the working day and you're de-stressing in the gym. At lunch you had a healthy salad instead of joining your colleagues at the local greasy spoon. This morning, you walked to work. All in all, you're feeling pretty pleased with yourself.

Heading home, you pop into the shop to pick up a bottle of wine to share with your partner at dinner. You intend to have one glass - but end up drinking the bottle.

This is a common scenario in some homes. But regardless of how healthy you think your behaviour is in an average day, by regularly drinking more than the lower risk daily guidelines you could be damaging your health. Alcohol doesn't just negatively affect alcoholics - regularly drink more than you should and you increase your risk of developing both long and short-term health harms.

1

You might be a binge drinker and not even know it

The UK has one of the highest rates of binge drinking in Europe.

The NHS defines binge drinking as drinking more than double the daily unit guidelines in one session. For men this is more than eight units, and for women, more than six. However, because individuals are all different, the rate at which they reach intoxication varies.

Avoiding alcohol all week to “save up” your units for one night isn’t going to do your body any favours. And it doesn’t matter what you drink – it’s how much. The harmful effects of drinking are almost entirely related to the alcohol content of what you drink, not the type of drink. In other words, beers are no safer than spirits.

Binge drinking is a major factor in accidents, violence and anti-social behaviour. In young people, it’s also associated with a range of risky behaviours, including a higher chance of contracting a sexually transmitted disease.

An easy way to see if you are binge drinking, or drinking to high risk levels, is by tracking your drinks on Drinkaware.co.uk – an online drinks diary and unit calculator that gives personalised feedback and tips to help you cut down if you need to.



There were 8,748 alcohol-related deaths in the UK in 2011.¹

¹ ONS: Alcohol-related deaths in the United Kingdom, 2011.

2

Short-and long-term effects of drinking

There are short and long term effects of drinking more than the daily unit guidelines.

But when you reduce your drinking, the short term symptoms of consuming too much alcohol can improve.

Short-term effects include:

- **disturbed sleep and sleeplessness**
- **feeling stressed**
- **memory loss or blackouts**
- **sweating**
- **shaking**
- **loss of appetite**
- **stomach problems**
- **anxiety**
- **impaired judgement which can lead to accidents and injuries**
- **diarrhoea**
- **sickness**
- **bad skin**
- **weight gain**

When you reduce your drinking, the short term symptoms of consuming too much alcohol can improve.

Regular drinking above the guidelines causes long-term damage to your health.

Alcohol can contribute to:

- **raised blood pressure**
- **liver disease**
- **cancers, particularly breast cancer and cancer of the gullet**
- **mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety**
- **infertility**
- **heart disease**
- **stomach ulcers**
- **damage to an unborn child**
- **osteoporosis (thinning of the bones)**
- **pancreatitis**
- **stroke**
- **dementia**
- **brain damage**

Some effects of drinking to excess are not reversible and can cause permanent damage to your health.

3


Drinking too much can make you put on weight

You'd probably think twice about eating a hot dog, followed by a burger, with a doughnut for dessert. But drinking four pints of 5% cider might not cause you such concern. In fact, you'd be consuming about the same amount of calories in each situation – around 1,000.

Alcohol is seriously fattening.

But it isn't just the calories in the drink that makes you gain weight. Alcohol reduces the amount of fat your body burns for energy. Because we can't store alcohol in the body, our systems want to get rid of it as quickly as possible, and this process takes priority over absorbing nutrients and burning fat.

Adding 3 or 4 units per day to your usual diet would lead to an increase in weight of around 4lbs in four weeks.



Drinking after a workout can cancel any gains.

4

Five ways your GP can help you take control of your drinking

Discussing your concerns

GPs are increasingly involved in helping people to stay fit and healthy. And since a healthy lifestyle is a key factor for preventing illness, your GP will be happy to spend time discussing any concerns you have about how much you drink.

Assessing you to see whether you're dependent on alcohol

If you think you are already experiencing some of the possible harmful effects of drinking, or that you have become dependent on alcohol, your GP can help. They will listen to your symptoms and concerns and assess whether you have become dependent on alcohol.

Examining you

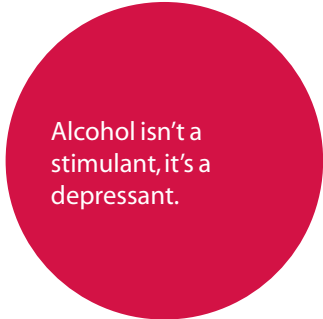
Your GP may also examine you to see if there are any physical signs of disease. They will be able to arrange blood tests and, if necessary, additional radiological examinations, like a liver ultrasound scan.

Helping you detox

If you have become dependent on alcohol, your doctor can offer you advice, support and prescriptions for medications to help you detox.

Referring you to a specialist

Your GP may offer you advice and support in the practice or refer you to another professional, such as a hospital specialist consultant. Alternatively, you and your GP may decide that it would be better for you to be referred to a specialist alcohol treatment unit.



Alcohol isn't a stimulant, it's a depressant.


5

Stick to safe levels of drinking to protect your health

The alcohol content of drinks is measured in units. One unit is 10ml or 8g of pure alcohol. This equals one 25ml single measure of whisky (ABV 40%), around a third of a pint of 4% beer or roughly a third of a standard (175ml) glass of 13% wine.

The government advises that people should not regularly drink more than the daily unit guidelines of 3-4 units of alcohol for men (equivalent to a pint and a half of 4% beer) and 2-3 units of alcohol for women (equivalent to a 175 ml glass of 13% wine) 'Regularly' means drinking every day or most days of the week

Drinking in moderation should not have any adverse health effects.



Up to 17 million working days are lost each year due to the effects of alcohol.²

² Strategy Unit Alcohol Harm Reduction project, Interim Analytical Report for the National Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy, 2003.

Staying in control

The government advises that people should not regularly drink more than the daily unit guidelines of 3–4 units of alcohol for men (equivalent to a pint and a half of 4% beer) and 2–3 units of alcohol for women (equivalent to a 175 ml glass of 13% wine). 'Regularly' means drinking every day or most days of the week.



Here are three ways to keep your drinking under control:

A Give alcohol-free days a go.

Many medical experts recommend taking regular days off from drinking to ensure you don't become addicted to alcohol.

B Ask for support.

Tell friends and family that you're trying to cut down on alcohol - they might be more supportive than you think. But beware, some people don't like to have their drinking behaviour challenged. Be prepared to defend your decision by remembering the benefits that cutting down on alcohol brings.

C Keep track of your units.

Using our unit calculator will make the calculations easier or you can sign up to MyDrinkaware to track your drinking over time. Find out more at [Drinkaware.co.uk](https://www.drinkaware.co.uk)

We've got the answers at **drinkaware.co.uk**

Advice

The government advises that people should not regularly drink more than the daily unit guidelines of 3-4 units of alcohol for men (equivalent to a pint and a half of 4% beer) and 2-3 units of alcohol for women (equivalent to a 175 ml glass of 13% wine). 'Regularly' means drinking every day or most days of the week.

Other useful contacts

For the facts on alcohol and to keep track of your units through our MyDrinkaware tool, visit the Drinkaware website Drinkaware.co.uk

Your GP can help you figure out if you should make any changes to your drinking, and offer help and advice.

If you're concerned about someone's drinking, or your own, Drinkline runs a free, confidential helpline. Call 0800 917 8282.

for the facts
drinkaware.co.uk

