

How much should I be drinking?

Understanding the new drinking guidelines



In 2016 new alcohol guidelines were published by the UK's Chief Medical Officers (CMOs) to enable people to make informed choices about their drinking and reduce alcohol-related health harms.

The guidelines recommend a level of consumption that reduces the risk of dying of an alcohol-related cause to less than 1%. They are not instructions or rules, but information to help individuals make decisions around their drinking.

Why have the guidelines changed?

The national drinking guidelines were last revised in 1995. In light of new research on health risks even at low levels of drinking, these guidelines needed updating.

What are the key changes?

- The drinking guidelines now recommend **the same low-risk level for men and women**. This is because, while long-term alcohol-health risks are generally higher for women than men, men face much higher risks of acute harm (e.g. injury) on single drinking occasions. The lower-risk level is therefore set at the same amount for both genders
- **Pregnant women should avoid drinking altogether**; while the previous guidelines recommended that pregnant women avoid drinking, it also said that if pregnant women choose to drink, they should consume no more than one or two units once or twice a week. The new guidelines adopt a more precautionary approach, with the view that a simple no-drinking message will avoid confusion

Does alcohol affect people in different ways?

Yes, how alcohol affects individuals depends on a wide range of factors including genetic make-up, diet, weight, general health and age. The guidelines, however, are based on research evidence for minimum levels of risk, so that they can be followed by everyone.



The guidelines recommend that:

- Men and women should not regularly drink more than 14 units of alcohol a week. Units should ideally be spread evenly over three days or more. You should have several alcohol-free days each week
- Drinkers should limit the amount they consume on single occasions, and combine drinking alcohol with eating food and drinking water
- Pregnant women should avoid drinking altogether



FOR MEN and WOMEN

To keep health risks from drinking alcohol to a low level, men and women should not regularly exceed 14 units per week and it is advisable to spread your drinking over three days or more.*



THIS IS WHAT 14 UNITS LOOKS LIKE



14
SINGLE MEASURES
of SPIRIT
(25ml) **40% ABV**

or



6
GLASSES of WINE
(175ml) **13% ABV**

or



6
PINTS of ORDINARY
STRENGTH
BEER/LAGER/CIDER
(568ml) **4% ABV**

ABV = Alcohol by volume



Remember the drinks you pour at home may be larger than the measures used in pubs.

If you are pregnant, the safest approach is **not to drink alcohol at all**, to keep risks to your baby to a minimum.



*Department of Health, UK Chief Medical Officers' Low Risk Drinking Guidelines, August 2016

What should I do if I'm drinking above the recommended guidelines?

If you're concerned that you might be drinking too much, there are small behavioural changes you can make to cut back:

- Keep a drinks diary to keep track of how much you're consuming
- Avoid drinking in rounds
- Take more alcohol-free days
- Do more activities that don't involve alcohol

If you would like to keep track of your drinking, and get advice and tips for cutting down, download our **Dry January and Beyond** app (available for Apple and Android).

To get a sense of whether you might be drinking at hazardous or harmful levels, try taking our alcohol audit at alcoholconcern.org.uk

Further support

- If you think you and/or someone you know may be drinking too much, contact **Drinkline** (England) on **0300 123 1110** or **Dan24/7** (Wales) on **0808 808 2234**
- **Al-Anon** provides support to anyone whose life is, or has been, affected by someone else's drinking. Visit al-anonuk.org.uk
- You can find more support services through **Adfam**. Visit adfam.org.uk
- Read our other factsheets about alcohol and families at alcoholconcern.org.uk/alcohol-awareness-week