

Registered Office:
Rutland House,
25 The Tything, Worcester WR1 1JL
Telephone: 01905 27417

Mitre House,
27 The Strand, Bromsgrove B61 8AB
Telephone: 01527 870707

26 Church Street, Kidderminster DY10 2AR
Telephone: 01562 863386

Community House,
103 Easemore Road, Redditch B98 8EY
Telephone: 01527 870707

Community Alcohol Team operating as
Worcestershire Community Alcohol Team
registered charity number 1112818.
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ALCOHOL AND YOU



Alcohol and You

Most people drink at least occasionally and in moderation, drinking alcohol can enhance our quality of life. It helps individuals unwind and relax and it's enjoyable to do with friends.

As alcohol is so socially acceptable, it is easy to forget the harm it can cause to our physical, psychological and/or social wellbeing.

Do you think you're drinking too much?

You could have a problem if:

- One drink is never enough
- You get drunk frequently
- The amount you drink has increased
- You're having less alcohol free days
- You're letting people down as a result of drinking
- You're drinking on your own
- You're making excuses to drink
- You're spending increasing amounts on alcohol
- You're less interested in other things because of drink
- You feel guilty about your drinking
- You get the shakes in the morning

Check your alcohol consumption further by answering the questions overleaf:

AUDIT - PC

| ALCOHOL SCREENING QUESTIONS | 0 | 1 | SCORE 2 | 3 | 4 |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|-------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. How often do you have a drink containing alcohol? | Never | Monthly or less | 2-4 times a month | 2-3 times a week | 4 or more times a week |
| 2. How many drinks containing alcohol do you have on a typical day when you are drinking? | 1 or 2 | 3 or 4 | 5 or 6 | 7 or 8 | 10 or more |
| 3. How often during the last year have you found that you were not able to stop drinking once you had started? | Never | Less than monthly | Monthly | Weekly | Daily or almost daily |
| 4. How often during the last year have you failed to do what was normally expected of you because of your drinking? | Never | Less than monthly | Monthly | Weekly | Daily or almost daily |
| 5. Has a relative, friend, doctor or other health worker been concerned about your drinking or suggested you cut down? | No | | Yes, but not in the past year | | Yes, during the last year |

If the total score is five or above it might be useful to discuss alcohol consumption further.

Safe and sensible drinking

Pregnant women or women trying to conceive should avoid drinking alcohol.

In all cases it is recommended that individuals aim to have alcohol free days.

Regularly drinking more than 6 units/day or 35 units/week for women or 8 units/day and 50 units/week for men significantly raises the likelihood of the development of physical and/or mental health problems and increases the risk of becoming alcohol dependent.



MEN

Should not regularly drink more than 3-4 units a day



WOMEN

Should not regularly drink more than 2-3 units a day



PREGNANT WOMEN

Avoid alcohol altogether

Why the gender differences in safe drinking limits?

Women have a proportionally higher ratio of fat to water than men and are therefore less able to dilute alcohol within the body. Because of this women will have a higher blood alcohol concentration (BAC) after drinking the same amount of alcohol. Even allowing for body weight, a woman will attain a higher BAC than a man from consuming the same quantity of alcohol. This is also thought to be because women have lower levels of alcohol dehydrogenase, an enzyme involved in the metabolism of alcohol.

You may want to keep track of what you drink in a day or evening, and count your units.

DRINK DIARY

| How many units in a drink? | | Day | Time | Where and who with? | No. of Drinks |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-----|------|---------------------|---------------|
|  standard lager/beer: bottle 330ml } (3.5-4%) can 440ml } | 1.3 units | | | | |
| | 1.8 units | | | | = ? units |
|  700ml bottle spirits | 28-30 units | | | | |
| | | | | | = ? units |
|  275ml bottle alcopops | 1.5 units | | | | |
| | | | | | = ? units |
|  1 pint standard lager/beer (3.5%) 1 pint medium (5.2%) 1 pint strong (7.5%) | 2 units | | | | |
| | 3 units | | | | |
| | 4.5 units | | | | = ? units |
|  Wine (12%) standard glass 175ml large glass 250ml | 2.1 units | | | | |
| | 3 units | | | | = ? units |
|  strong cider 1 pint (6%) 1 pint 440ml can } (7.5%) | 3.4 units | | | | |
| | 4 units | | | | |
| | 3.25 units | | | | = ? units |
|  35ml measure gin/rum/ vodka/whisky | 1.3 units | | | | |
| | | | | | = ? units |

Some problems associated with drinking...

unwanted pregnancy
loss of libido
impotence

frequent headaches
indigestion
poor appetite
nausea
lethargy
weight gain
hand tremor
raised blood pressure
increased risk of stroke/heart attack
liver problems
acute alcohol poisoning

regular time off sick from work
criminal activity
drink-driving
aggression/violence
injury/accidents
financial problems

anxiety/panic attacks
insomnia /poor sleep
depression
increased risk of suicide
short-term memory loss

But I only drink at weekends...

For many of us drinking only takes place at weekends; however, drinking a lot of alcohol in one session or drinking to get drunk can cause problems.

Drinking in this way is referred to as 'binge drinking'. Officially, this would be six or more units in one session for women or eight or more for men.

As a depressant drug, alcohol 'switches off' some of the inhibitions we have when sober. When drunk, pent-up feelings such as unhappiness or anger may surface and we may take risks that we wouldn't ordinarily consider. As a result, drinking large amounts in one session can cloud our judgement and cause us to behave in ways that we wouldn't normally contemplate.

Alcohol also affects co-ordination; accidents can occur even after drinking small amounts.

A recent government paper entitled '*Safe, Sensible and Social the Next Steps in the National Alcohol Strategy*' (June 2007) suggested that, 'We must sharpen our focus on the minority of drinkers who cause or experience the most harm to themselves, their communities and their families.'

These have been identified as:

- **young people under 18 who drink alcohol**, many of whom we now know are drinking more than their counterparts did a decade ago
- **18-24-year-old binge drinkers**, a minority of whom are responsible for the majority of alcohol-related crime and disorder in the night-time economy
- **harmful drinkers**, many of whom don't realise that their drinking patterns damage their physical and mental health and may be causing substantial harm to others through anti-social behaviours.

Also of note...

Deaths from liver cirrhosis have risen in the 25–34 age group, and this is thought to be a consequence of increased drinking starting at an earlier age.

People who become dependent on alcohol in later life have often started binge drinking before the age of 14.

As you get older alcohol has stronger and longer lasting effects. In other words you can get drunk more quickly than when you were younger.

Behaviour typical of old age could be worsened by alcohol, for example: forgetfulness, confusion, depression, shakiness and sleep problems. A carer might misread these symptoms not realising that the individual is drinking.

Alcohol is now the third leading cause of premature death in the UK.

Medication and alcohol.

Some medicines alter the way that alcohol is processed in the body; in other words the effects of alcohol may be experienced more quickly and more intensely.

Sometimes medication and alcohol will act together in unpredictable ways, for example: alcohol taken with sleeping tablets or pain-killers can make people drowsier.

Drinking alcohol means that some medication doesn't work or isn't as effective as it should be, for example: anti-depressants.

Dependent drinking.

Regular drinking outside safe limits can lead to physical dependency upon alcohol. This will mean that an individual will need to consume increasing quantities of alcohol in order to be able to function.

Alcohol dependency is characterized by:

A need to maintain adequate blood alcohol levels within the body. A failure to do so could result in severe alcohol withdrawal.

Alcohol withdrawal

Withdrawal from alcohol may be controlled and under supervision, or circumstantial and enforced.

Not all drinkers require medication to 'come off' alcohol – some can adhere to a controlled reduction with minimal medical risk or symptoms of withdrawal.

We often experience mild alcohol withdrawal symptoms after a night out-usually referred to as a hangover. However the more alcohol that is consumed on a regular basis the more likely withdrawal symptoms are to occur if that supply of alcohol was to cease for any reason.

'Enforced detox' may come about because a person is hospitalised, imprisoned or financially unable to purchase further alcohol. If others have not been made aware that there is a drink issue and no medication has been administered, then there is a good chance the individual will experience withdrawal symptoms.

For safety purposes it is reasonable to assume that the higher the unit intake the more severe the withdrawal. **Heavy drinkers are always advised to avoid stopping suddenly and to seek help from a professional so that the withdrawal can be supervised safely.**

Indicators of withdrawal

There are a number of indicators of alcohol withdrawal. It is important to be aware of these because unsupervised withdrawal can be dangerous.

Poor appetite/nausea

Tremors

Sweats

Agitation

Sleep disturbance

Raised temperature

Increased pulse rate

Seizures

Hallucinations

Essential safety information.

Never leave a drunk person on their own especially if they appear sleepy.

Turn them onto their side (recovery position) so that if they vomit they won't choke.

If you are unable to wake them or if you are particularly concerned, dial 999.

Keep them warm and stay with them until help arrives.