



Improving Health Together

Public Health factsheet from the Health Improvement Team

www.nyypct.nhs.uk/StayingHealthy

Welcome to this edition of Improving Health Together which focuses on the issue of alcohol.

Alcohol is something to be enjoyed, however drinking too much or at the wrong time can be harmful. It is important to know where the benefits end and the risks begin.

The weekly guideline for low risk drinking is:

- ◆ 14-21 units for women
- ◆ 21-28 units for men.

It is not safe to save up your daily units and drink them in one go.

A binge is 6 units or more for women, and 8 units or more for men in one drinking session.

After an episode of heavy drinking, it is advisable to refrain from drinking for 48 hours to allow your body to recover.

One in four men and one in seven women exceed the recommended daily units of alcohol. Many people underestimate how much they actually drink.

Alcohol

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Sensible drinking. How much is too much?

Sensible drinking is drinking in a way that is unlikely to cause harm to yourself or others. The Government advises that:



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
Should avoid alcohol altogether and never drink more than 1-2 units once or twice a week.

Updated NICE guidance 2008 for Antenatal care

www.nice.org.uk/guidance/index.jsp?action=byID&o=11947

NEW: Pregnant women or women planning a pregnancy should be advised to avoid drinking alcohol in the first 3 months of pregnancy because there may be an increased risk of miscarriage.

NEW: If they do choose to drink, they should not drink more than 1-2 units of alcohol once or twice a week and should not get drunk.

NEW: Women should be informed that getting drunk or binge drinking during pregnancy may be harmful to the unborn baby.

Harmful drinking is drinking at levels that lead to significant harm to physical and mental health and at levels that may be causing substantial harm to others. Women who drink over 35 units a week (or who regularly drink over six units a day) and men who drink over 50 units a week (or who regularly drink over eight units a day) are at high risk of such harm. There are times when it is sensible not to drink – when driving, operating machinery or when taking certain medications.

What is a unit?

A unit of alcohol is 10ml of pure alcohol. Counting units of alcohol can help to keep track of the amount drunk. The list below shows the number of units of alcohol in common drinks:

One unit is equal to:


Half pint of regular beer, lager or cider


1 small glass of wine


1 single measure of spirits


1 small glass of sherry


1 single measure of aperitifs

The following quantities of alcohol contain more than 1 unit:


Pint of Regular Beer/Lager/Cider


Pint of Premium Beer/Lager/Cider


Alcopop or can/bottle of Regular Lager


Can of Premium Lager or Strong Beer


Can of Super Strength Lager


Glass of Wine (175ml)


Bottle of Wine

Harms associated with the misuse of alcohol

Harms to health	Crime and anti-social behaviour
Loss of productivity in the workplace	Social harms, such as family breakdown

- ◆ 20% of patients presenting to primary care are likely to be excessive drinkers and problem drinkers are known to consult their GPs twice as often than the average patient. The most common complaints are gastrointestinal, psychiatric and accidents.
- ◆ 1 in 4 acute male admissions are alcohol-related.
- ◆ At least 5-7% of diagnosed cases of hypertension are due to heavy drinking and it is the most common cause after obesity.
- ◆ Alcohol misuse is implicated in 50% of violent crimes and around a third of all domestic violence is linked to alcohol.
- ◆ Around £1 in every £3 spent in A&E is alcohol related.
- ◆ Around one million children live in families where one or both parents misuse alcohol.
- ◆ 40% of 13-14 year olds were drunk when they first had sexual intercourse.
- ◆ Around 25% of children aged 11-15 drink alcohol, drinking an average of around 10 units per week.

Health benefits of alcohol

Alcohol can protect against coronary heart disease, however the protective effect is only significant for men over 40 and post-menopausal women, and the maximum benefit is gained from drinking between 1 and 2 units a day.

Both non-drinkers and drinkers can do other things to reduce their risk of coronary heart disease, i.e. stopping smoking, eating a healthy diet, being physically active.

What are the risks?

Regularly drinking too much increases the following risks of long-term damage to health including:

Condition	Increased risk	
	Men	Women
Hypertension (high blood pressure)	4 times	Double
Stroke	Double	4 times
Coronary heart disease (CHD)	1.7 times	1.3 times
Pancreatitis	Triple	Double
Liver disease	13 times	13 times

Source: P Anderson 2007 (Unpublished Department of Health)

Other risks of damage to health include:

- ◆ some cancers (mouth, gullet, liver, colon and breast)
- ◆ sexual difficulties such as impotence
- ◆ alcohol is connected to a range of mental health problems including, depression, anxiety, sleeping problems, bereavement, panic attacks and chronic fatigue. Alcohol can exacerbate mental health problems and delay recovery.

Binge drinking can also cause potential harm to others through:

- ◆ accidents – increased risk of injury and death from fire and car crashes
- ◆ violence – physical and sexual assaults and domestic violence
- ◆ argumentative behaviour
- ◆ unsafe sex
- ◆ emotional and financial problems.



FACT

It is NOT true that Guinness is rich in iron – you would need to drink more than 35 pints per day to get the recommended daily intake of iron.

Alcohol and it's effects

- ◆ Alcohol is a depressant drug and slows reactions.
- ◆ Alcohol disrupts the natural sleep pattern.
- ◆ Alcohol causes the surface of the body to heat up but cools the core temperature down.
- ◆ Within minutes of drinking, alcohol is absorbed into the bloodstream and carried to all parts of the body, including the brain.
- ◆ A healthy liver takes about one hour to break down and remove one unit of alcohol.
- ◆ Alcohol causes dehydration and lowers the blood sugar levels.
- ◆ Alcohol is loaded with calories, but has no real nutritional value.
- ◆ People who drink regularly become less affected by alcohol (tolerance) as their bodies get used to it. They need to drink more for it to have the same effect and although they may not feel drunk, they still run a serious risk of damaging their health.

Some physical changes due to harmful drinking

Dry skin: alcohol dehydrates your body and skin, because it blocks the release of anti-diuretic hormones, so the kidneys get rid of too much water.

Broken veins: alcohol dilates blood vessels near the surface of the skin, causing ugly red capillaries or veins, especially around the nose and cheeks.

Bloodshot eyes: alcohol can inflame and enlarge the small blood vessels on the surface of the eyes.

Weight gain: see table below.

If you are watching your weight, watch your drinking. The recommended daily calorie intake for women is 2,000 and for men 2,500.

Drink	Units	Calories	Food equivalent
White wine (175ml)	2.1	130	A bag of crisps
Red wine (175ml)	2.1	120	A slice of cheese and tomato pizza
Lager or beer (a pint)	2.3	170	A small sausage roll
Cider (a pint)	3.4	200	A mince pie
Tequila (25ml)	1.0	160	A doughnut
Alcopop ((275ml)	1.4	200	A chicken drumstick

www.knowyourlimits.gov.uk

FACT

Only time can remove alcohol from your bloodstream: black coffee, cold showers and fresh air will not sober you up.

How to drink sensibly

- ◆ Stick to the recommended guidelines.
- ◆ Try to have days when you do not drink alcohol.
- ◆ Alternate your alcoholic drinks with ones containing no alcohol.
- ◆ Try not to drink on an empty stomach.
- ◆ Avoid buying in rounds, and drink slowly.
- ◆ Keep a daily drinks diary to monitor your consumption.
- ◆ Dilute your drinks – mix wine with soda, beer with lemonade. If you drink spirits, add lots of tonic, soda water or juice.
- ◆ Avoid spirits and extra strong lager or cider.



Helping change behaviour

Identification and treatment of an individual's alcohol problems can prevent and reduce the physical, mental and social harms, which can arise.

In health care settings, review-level evidence suggests:

- ◆ heavy drinkers receiving brief interventions are twice as likely to moderate their drinking 6 – 12 months after an intervention, when compared with drinkers receiving no intervention
- ◆ brief interventions can cause a 13-34% net reduction in weekly drinking resulting in a significant effect on safe alcohol use
- ◆ the use of self help materials such as brochures, manuals and books is cost effective in decreasing at risk and harmful drinking.

Prevention of Alcohol Misuse (2004) Health Development Agency

What is a brief intervention

A brief intervention can be as simple as raising the issue and asking some initial questions about a patient/client's alcohol use. Information about the effects of alcohol, where to get further help and encouragement to reduce consumption can be given. The following questions could be asked:

- ◆ Do you feel you should cut down your drinking?
- ◆ Has anyone ever criticised your drinking?
- ◆ Have you ever felt guilty about how much you drink?
- ◆ Do you need a drink to steady your nerves in the morning?

If the answer is YES to two or more questions the patient/client could be psychologically and/or physically dependent on alcohol and should be offered help. They should be given information about the effects of alcohol, ways to cut down, ways to get further information and support and be encouraged to reduce consumption.

Once they know the facts, many people can quite easily revert back to sensible drinking if they are drinking above the safe limits. However, dependent drinkers may need referral for specialist help.

North Yorkshire and York Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy

Key organisations and partnerships in the county recognise alcohol as a priority to be addressed and have produced a county wide Alcohol Strategy, which focuses on four main areas: education and communication, health and treatment services, regulation and enforcement, and offending, resettlement and rehabilitation. The Strategy is available at www.nyypct.nhs.uk/StayingHealthy/Alcohol/KeyDocuments.htm.

Other local alcohol strategies can also be found at the above link.

Key documents

Department of Health (2007) *Safe. Sensible. Social. The next steps in the National Alcohol Strategy*

www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_075218

Department of Health (2006) *Models of Care for Alcohol Misusers* www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4136806

National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse (2006) *Review of the Effectiveness of Treatment for Alcohol Problems* www.nta.nhs.uk/publications/documents/nta_review_of_the_effectiveness_of_treatment_for_alcohol_problems_fullreport_2006_alcohol2.pdf

Home Office, Department of Health, Department for Children, Schools & Families (2005) *Safe. Sensible. Social. Alcohol strategy local implementation toolkit* www.dh.gov.uk/en/PublicHealth/HealthImprovement/Alcoholmisuse/index.htm

Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, Cabinet Office (2004) *Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy for England* www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/strategy/work_areas/alcohol_misuse.aspx

Local Alcohol Services

The following local non-statutory services offer confidential, free, advice, information and support for anyone concerned about their own or anyone else's drinking. They accept self referrals or referrals from professionals.

- ◆ Craven Drug & Alcohol Agency—01756 794362
- ◆ Hambleton & Richmondshire Community Addictions Service—01609 780486
- ◆ Harrogate Drug and Alcohol Agency—01423 525999
- ◆ The Cambridge Centre, Scarborough—01723 367475
- ◆ The Cambridge Centre, Whitby—01947 601601
- ◆ Selby District Alcohol Service—01757 293600
- ◆ York Alcohol Advice Service—01904 652104

Statutory community alcohol services providing assessment, community detoxification, etc., are available across the county through GP practices.

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Websites

Drinkline

www.knowyourlimits.gov.uk

National alcohol helpline providing information, advice and support. Has a database of local alcohol support services for anywhere in the country. Freephone 0800 917 8282 (the number does not appear on phone bills).



DRINKAWARE.CO.UK

www.drinkaware.co.uk



Interactive site with information about alcohol & drinking, practical tips to cut down, drinks diary & questionnaires.

Down Your Drink

www.downyourdrink.org.uk

A six week online programme to help users reduce drinking and develop safer drinking habits. Free and confidential.



Alcohol Concern

www.alcoholconcern.org.uk



The national agency on alcohol misuse. General information about alcohol including useful factsheets, call 020 7264 0510.

Adfam

www.adfam.org.uk

Information and advice for families of alcohol and drug users. The website has a list of local family support services. Call 020 7928 889.



Alcoholics Anonymous

www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk

A peer support organisation to help people stop drinking. Local groups throughout the county 0845 769 7555.



NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk/livewell/alcohol/Pages/Alcoholhome.aspx



A service that helps you to make the most of your health and get the best out of the NHS.

Order your free resources

These are the resources recommended by your Public Health team for use with this alcohol campaign.

Contact the Department of Health on 08701 555 455 to order resources for the 'Know Your Limits' campaign.

19 May - Units / 16 June - Binge Drinking

Resources for the above two new campaigns can be downloaded from the 19 May at www.nhs.uk/alcoholstakeholders or by contacting 'Forster for Change' on 020 7403 2230 or Dept of Health on 08701 555 455.

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