



York Teaching Hospital
NHS Foundation Trust

Alcohol Excess

Information for patients, relatives and carers

① For more information, please contact:

Substance Misuse Liaison Service

York Hospital

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Introduction

This information is designed to help those who want to know more about drinking and its effects, and to provide further help and support if they feel they are drinking too much. You'll discover how many units of alcohol there are in your drinks and what the lower, increasing and higher risk levels are.

With so many different drinks and glass sizes, from shots to pints – not to mention bottles – it's easy to get confused about how many units are in your drink. The NHS recommends:

- Both men and women should not regularly drink more than 14 units per week spread over three or more days.
- If you are pregnant or think you could become pregnant, the safest approach is not to drink alcohol at all, to keep risks to your baby to a minimum.
- Limit the total amount of alcohol you drink on any single occasion and drink more slowly, with food, and alternate with water.

'Regularly' means drinking this amount every day or most days of the week. You should also take a break for 48 hours after a heavy session to let your body recover.

So what is a unit?

Units are a simple way of expressing the quantity of pure alcohol in a drink. One unit equals 10 millilitres or 8 grams of pure alcohol, which is around the amount of alcohol the average adult can process in an hour. This means that within an hour there should be, in theory, little or no alcohol left in the blood of an adult, although this will vary from person to person.

The number of units in a drink is based on the size of the drink as well as its alcohol strength. For example, a pint of strong lager contains three units of alcohol, whereas the same volume of standard lager has just over two units.

ABV (alcohol by volume) is a measure of the amount of pure alcohol as a percentage of the total volume of liquid in a drink. You can find the ABV on the labels of cans and bottles, sometimes written as "vol" or "alcohol volume". For example, wine that says "12% ABV" or "alcohol volume 12%" means that 12% of the volume of that drink is pure alcohol.

The formula to work out the amount of units in your drink is:

$$\text{Strength (ABV)} \times \text{Volume (ml)} \div 1000 = \text{units}$$

What category are you?

Risk	Men	Women	Common Effects
Lower Risk	No more than 14 units per week spread over three or more days	No more than 14 units per week spread over three or more days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased relaxation • Sociability • Sensory enjoyment of alcoholic drinks
Increasing Risk	Regularly drinking 15-50 units per week	Regularly drinking 15-35 units per week	Progressively increasing risk of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low energy • Relationship problems
Higher Risk	More than eight units per day on a regular basis or more than 50 units per week	More than six units per day on a regular basis or more than 35 units per week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depression • Insomnia • Impotence • Injury • Alcohol dependence • Breast, mouth and throat cancer • High blood pressure • Liver disease

Lower risk

Lower risk drinking means that in most circumstances you have a low risk of causing yourself future harm.

There is no completely safe level of drinking and drinking even small amounts of alcohol can incur risk in certain circumstances. For example, with strenuous exercise, operating heavy machinery, driving or if you are on certain medications.

If you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, the safest approach is not to drink alcohol at all.

Drinking in pregnancy can harm the baby, with the more you drink the greater the risk. The risk of harm to the baby is likely to be low if a woman has drunk only small amounts of alcohol before she knew she was pregnant or during pregnancy.

Increasing risk

If you fall in the increasing risk category, you may be surprised to know that drinking at this level increases the risk of damaging your health. If you regularly drink at this level you might already have experienced problems like feeling tired, feeling depressed, gaining extra weight, memory loss when drinking, sleeping badly and sexual difficulties.

Drinking around the increasing risk category increases the risk of serious medical conditions compared to non-drinkers:

- Men are 1.8 to 2.5 times as likely to get mouth cancer, pharynx or larynx (part of the neck and throat), and women are 1.2 to 1.7 times as likely.
- Women are 1.2 times as likely to develop breast cancer.
- Men are 2 times as likely to develop liver cirrhosis, and women are 1.7 times as likely.
- Men are 1.8 times as likely to develop high blood pressure, with women 1.3 times more likely.

In addition, some people become argumentative when they are drinking which can lead to a negative effect on relationships with family and friends.

Higher risk

Drinking at this level, compared with increasing risk drinking, you are at even higher risk of damaging your health. All parts and systems of the body are affected by the alcohol you are drinking and it can play a role in more than 60 different medical conditions.

If you regularly drink above the higher risk threshold, compared to non-drinkers:

- You could be three to five times more likely to get cancer of the mouth, pharynx or larynx (neck and throat).
- You could be three to 10 times more likely to develop liver cirrhosis
- Men could have four times the risk of suffering from high blood pressure, and women are at least twice as likely to develop it.
- You could be two times as likely to suffer from an irregular heartbeat.
- Women are around 50 percent more likely to get breast cancer.

Cutting down on your drinking

Some people may be surprised or shocked to find themselves in the increasing or higher risk categories. If you do fall in these categories you may want to cut down on your alcohol intake to reduce your risk to your health.

Some people may need to stop drinking altogether. It is best to stop drinking completely if:

- You have a health problem, such as liver or heart disease.
- You regularly have memory blackouts, so that you can't remember things when you were drinking.
- You are thinking of becoming pregnant or are already pregnant. The safest approach is not to drink alcohol at all, to keep risks to your baby to a minimum.
- You are taking medication that doesn't mix with your drinking.
- You think your life would be better if you stopped drinking altogether.

Warning

It can be dangerous to stop drinking suddenly, so to avoid the dangers of severe withdrawal symptoms* we strongly recommend seeking medical advice before stopping drinking.

If you are attempting to do this yourself reduce your drinking gradually over the course of several weeks. If in doubt consult your doctor.

*Withdrawal symptoms may vary in intensity from one person to another. They include shaking, sweating and feeling anxious.

Severe symptoms include hallucinations, confusion, marked tremor and withdrawal fits/seizures, but these occur in the minority of cases and with careful monitoring of reduction or the use of prescribed medication they can be prevented.

The following information may be helpful following a 6-step plan that may help you cut down on your drinking. It won't be easy but thousands of people have succeeded and their lives and those of their families and friends have improved as a result.

The 6-Step Plan

Step 1- Think of some good reasons to change

There are plenty of good reasons to cut down on your drinking- here are some examples, and you can probably think of more. Think about which ones that appeal to you most. There's also some space below where you can add any more reasons that you think of.

Good reasons to drink less

- You'll have more time for things you've always wanted to do.
- You'll save a lot of money.
- You'll feel happier.
- You'll be less likely to argue with those around you.
- You'll sleep better.
- You can have a positive influence on your children's' own view of alcohol and the choices they make.
- You'll have more energy.
- It can help you lose weight.
- Your memory of a night out will be better.
- You'll be less likely to develop high blood pressure.
- You'll be less likely to develop other serious medical conditions such as heart and liver disease.

More reasons for cutting down on drinking:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Step 2- Set your goals

If you want to drink less, you need to set yourself goals. Your ultimate goal is to be in the lower risk category. It might take some time to get there, so make a plan for the next four weeks and set goals you can stick to. Choose your goals from one or more of these suggestions and score them from one to 10 depending on how realistic they are:

1- I'd be really lucky to do this 10- I know I can do this

Tick box		Score 1-10
<input type="checkbox"/>	I will not drink more than Units each day	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	I will not spend more than on alcohol each week	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	I will have alcohol-free days a week	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	I will decide how much I'm going to drink before I start drinking	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	I will take up a new hobby or activity to do at the same time I usually drink	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	I will (add your own below if you like):	<input type="checkbox"/>

Can you stick to your goals?

Look at your goals again. If you've scored any of them at five or lower, think about changing them to goals you're more likely to achieve; so for the next four weeks try to stick to these goals.

Step 3 - Know when you might slip up

No matter how much you want to change your drinking habits, there will be times when it is easy to slip up and drink too much. It may be when you're stressed or at a social occasion.

Think about the last few times you've had too much to drink. Where you were, who you were with and what were you feeling? Below is a list of times we can all relate to- tick the ones you think are most relevant to you. You can add more if you wish.

- When your boss is buying drinks after work.
- When you're meeting new people in social situations and feeling nervous.
- When you're celebrating at a party or club and people are encouraging you to have more.
- When you've had a hard day and you feel like you deserve a treat.
- When you're out with your mates and your supposed to keep up with them.

- When you need to relax and having a few drinks feels like the fastest way to do it.
- When you're watching TV and you don't really notice what you're drinking.
- When you're lonely or depressed and you think you might as well have another one.

Step 4 - Plan now for the times you might slip up

Thinking about these times now means that now you know when you're most likely to drink beyond your goals. So work out in advance how to cope.

Think of some examples of when you might slip up, such as at a party, after a stressful meeting at work, or going to watch the football. Write them down and then look at the ideas below on how to deal with them and choose which may be better for you.

Ways to cope:

- Switch to low-alcohol lager.
- Stick to single shots of spirits.
- Drink white wine and soda (spritzers) rather than just white wine.
- Have a soft drink before each alcoholic drink.
- Replace alcohol with your favourite soft drink.
- Eat a meal before drinking.

- Pace yourself at celebrations, sports events and evening dos.
- Delay the time you start drinking.
- After work, play football, join a gym or go to the cinema instead of the pub.
- Practise how to say no when alcohol is offered to you.
- If you're going out with people who drink heavily, try to avoid buying rounds (you could always get the first and then opt out).
- Let your friends, family and work colleagues know you're cutting down and ask them to be supportive.
- If you're stressed, chill out by going for a walk instead of drinking.

Step 5- Find support if you need it

Being in hospital can be difficult if you drink excessively. A nurse from the Substance Misuse Liaison Service or Liaison Mental Health Team may come to see you and/or be involved in planning your care and treatment whilst in hospital. They have specialist knowledge and experience of looking after the physical, emotional and social needs of hospital patients with alcohol problems. If you think this would be helpful you could check that you have been referred to the service by asking your nurse.

When you leave hospital some people find it easier to change their habits if they've got someone to talk to. So if you think it'll help you, ask for support.

Choose someone you can talk to easily, be honest with and get advice from when you need it. It could be a partner, a friend, a colleague or someone else you know who wants to cut down their drinking.

Step 6- Stick to your goals

This 6-step programme can really help break the habit and change your drinking. Don't be discouraged if you have a bad day or even a bad week. Just take one day at a time, stick to your goals and gradually it will get easier.

Some may find it helpful to keep a drinks diary to keep track of their units over the next couple of weeks. There is an example of a diary and unit tracker on the next page 17.

If you drink less, your lifestyle will have changed for the better and you'll have more time and energy for the things and people you love. It will be tough, but there is help available. Contact details of services that can offer help, advice and support are at the end of this information booklet.

Drink diary and unit tracker

Day	Type of drink	Number of drinks	Units	Total units for day
Example				
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				
Sunday				
<p>If you do find you are over the recommended limits (Both men and women should not regularly drink more than 14 units per week spread over three or more days) you may want to start cutting back</p>		Total		
		Daily average		

Driving

All applicants and licence holders have a legal responsibility to inform the Driver and Vehicle Licencing Authority (DVLA) of any injury or illness that would have a likely impact on safe driving ability. Alcohol and drugs have an influence on the brain and **will** affect driving performance, therefore can seriously affect your ability to drive. It is **your responsibility** to inform the DVLA if you have problematic alcohol or drug use.

The DVLA will then make a decision on your fitness to drive and may request medical information.

DVLA contact details:

Tel: 0300 790 6806

<https://www.gov.uk/contact-the-dvla>

Address: Drivers' Medical Enquiries, DVLA, Swansea, SA99 1TU

Where can I get more help?

Drinkline: 0300 1231110

A free and confidential helpline for people concerned about their own or someone else's drinking.

Available: Monday- Friday 9am-8pm or Saturday to Sunday 11am-4pm.

York Drug and Alcohol Service: 01904 464680

3 Blossom Street

York

YO24 1AU

<https://www.changing-lives.org.uk/>

Integrated community drug and alcohol treatment and support.

Changing Lives (Oaktrees): 01904 621776

<https://www.changing-lives.org.uk/>

Bowes Morrell House

111, Walmgate, York, YO1 9UA

A non-residential, abstinence based structured day programme for York.

North Yorkshire Horizons: 01723 330730

<https://www.nyhorizons.org.uk/>

Operates from five main Hubs across the county:

Harrogate - 7 North park Road, HG1 5PD

Northallerton - 5 The Applegarth, DL7 8LZ

Selby - 4 Park Street, Selby YO8 4PW

Scarborough - 56-60 Castle Road, YO11 1XE

Skipton - Mill Bridge House, 4A Mill Bridge, BD23 1NJ

Integrated community drug and alcohol treatment and support for North Yorkshire.

East Riding Partnership:

<https://www.humber.nhs.uk/services/east-riding-partnership.htm>

Operates from three hubs covering the East Riding geographical area and provides drop-in services for adults and young people:

The Central Hub

7 Baker Street

Hull, HU2 8HP

Tel: 01482 336675

The West Hub

100 Boothferry Road

Goole, DN14 6AE

Tel: 01405 608210

The East Hub
Becca House
27 St John's Avenue
Bridlington, YO16 4ND
Tel: 01262 458200

Alcoholics Anonymous: 0800 9177650
<https://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/>
Regular meetings take place every week in York and throughout North Yorkshire and there is a meeting in York Hospital every Sunday, 11am-12.15pm.

Narcotics Anonymous: 0300 9991212
<https://ukna.org/>
Regular meetings take place in York and throughout North Yorkshire.

Al-Anon Family Groups: 0800 0086811
<https://www.al-anonuk.org.uk/>
National help and support for families and friends.

Talk to Frank: 0300 1236600
<https://www.talktofrank.com/>
A free and confidential 24 hour helpline about drugs

York Carers Centre
<https://www.yorkcarerscentre.co.uk/>
Substance Misuse Support Group: 01904 715490
Information, advice and support for carers affected by alcohol and substance misuse. Regular monthly meetings are held.

Tell us what you think of this leaflet

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact:

Substance Misuse Liaison Service,
The York Hospital, Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE,
telephone 01904 726559 or email
substancemisuselianservice@york.nhs.uk.

Teaching, training and research

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email
pals@york.nhs.uk.

An answer phone is available out of hours.

Leaflets in alternative languages or formats

Please telephone or email if you require this information in a different language or format, for example Braille, large print or audio.

如果你要求本資 不同的 或 式提供 , 電
或發電

Jeżeli niniejsze informacje potrzebne są w innym języku lub formacie, należy zadzwonić lub wysłać wiadomość e-mail

Bu bilgileri değişik bir lisanda ya da formatta istiyorsanız lütfen telefon ediniz ya da e-posta gönderiniz

Telephone: 01904 725566

Email: access@york.nhs.uk

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