



Care first

drinking

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Most of the time, most people drink sensibly – as an enjoyable part of relaxing.

It is only when drinking heads out of control that it becomes a problem – to you and to the people closest to you. It may affect your job, family or friends; or all three.

This leaflet is to help you gauge levels of drinking, make choices about drink and find help if you need it. It is for drinkers and for those close to a drinker.

Drinking levels range from safe, through hazardous to dependent – try the test opposite on yourself or to clarify your concerns about someone else.

How many units?

			ABV*	UNITS
Spirits	average home measure	75ml	40%	3
	single pub measure	25ml	40%	1
Alcopop	one bottle	330ml	5.5%	2
Wine	one bottle	750ml	12%	9
	average home glass	200ml	12%	2.4
	large pub glass	175ml	12%	2
	small pub glass	125ml	12%	1.5
Wine (lower strength)	small pub glass	125ml	9%	1
Lager	super strength can	440ml	9%	4
	bottle	330ml	5.5%	2
Beer/Lager	pint or can	500ml	3.5-4%	2

* ABV: This number can be found on the packaging of your drink – percentage of alcohol by volume.

AUDIT Developed by the World Health Organisation

Circle your answers and then add up the scores. Would your spouse/partner agree with your answers?

	0 points	1 point	2 points	3 points	4 points
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
How many units do you drink on a typical day when you are drinking?	1 or 2	3 or 4	5 or 6	7-9	10 or more
How often do you have more than six units on one occasion?	never	less than monthly	monthly	weekly	daily or almost daily
How many times in the last year have you been unable to stop drinking once you started?	never	less than monthly	monthly	weekly	daily or almost daily
How often during the last year have you failed to do what was normally expected of you because of drinking?	never	less than monthly	monthly	weekly	daily or almost daily
How often during the last year have you been unable to remember what happened the night before because you had been drinking?	never	less than monthly	monthly	weekly	daily or almost daily
How often during the last year have you needed a drink in the morning to get yourself going after a heavy drinking session?	never	less than monthly	monthly	weekly	daily or almost daily
How many times in the last year have you had a feeling of guilt or remorse after drinking?	never	less than monthly	monthly	weekly	daily or almost daily
Have you, or anyone else, been injured as a result of your drinking?	never		yes, but not in the last year		yes, in the last year
Has a relative, friend or health professional, been concerned about your drinking or suggested you cut down?			yes, but not in the last year		yes, in the last year
	0 points	1 point	2 points	3 points	4 points

People say that some drinking is good for you, here are the facts:

Health benefits	Health risks
<p>There is a health benefit in drinking up to 2-3 units per day for women and 3-4 units per day for men. These guidelines only apply to post-menopausal women, and men over 40; other people get no health benefit from alcohol. Above these limits all the benefit is lost. Also, you can't save up units from one day to the next – it is a per day guideline.</p>	<p>shorter lifespan cancer heart disease stroke liver damage accidents Reduction or abstinence has an immediate positive effect</p>

Take your total AUDIT score (using the chart on page 3) and see which category you fit into.

SAFE

AUDIT score 0–7

No problem.

HAZARDOUS

AUDIT score 8–14

This is a level of drinking which carries with it some associated risks, whether you drink regularly or just have the odd binge. There is an impact on health and also the risk of your intake increasing. Keep it in check by having some personal rules, taking into account the national guidelines for sensible drinking: up to 4 units/day for men and up to 3 units/day for women – at this level health risks are minimal. It is for you to weigh up risks against benefits. Some easy and painless habits can reduce your intake without affecting your enjoyment:

- have a long soft drink or water before starting on alcohol;
- eat when you drink, but not salty snacks;
- have a glass of water next to your drink – overcome the habit of drinking alcohol to quench your thirst.



DEPENDENT

AUDIT score 15–40

You or your family may recognise some or all of the following symptoms:

- rarely stopping after 2 or 3 drinks
- agitation when drink is not available
- blackouts
- puffy face
- hidden bottles

- drinking or hand tremor in the morning
- blaming circumstances or others for drinking
- being angry when others criticise your drinking
- other hobbies and pleasures have been replaced by drinking
- loss of intimacy with partner/family
- destructive behaviour
- gastritis
- wanting to cut down but being unable to
- decline in health
- problems at work
- self pity (but little other emotion)

action

You need to take action now – it will only get harder the longer you leave it. Not wanting to accept that there is a problem is a normal part of alcohol dependence – because the next step (doing something about it) seems too painful.

You may choose to curb your drinking rather than abstaining completely. Abstinence may seem an unbearable prospect but it is generally believed to offer the best chance of recovery.

Keep in mind that millions of people have managed it and now have happy, productive lives. Don't try to sort it all out alone – you are far more likely to succeed with help and you will not be judged.



excuses?

"I can abstain for a few days (or weeks or months) – that proves that I am not an alcoholic". Many alcoholics abstain for long periods but when they start to drink again, they quickly slip back into dependency.

"How could I hold down my job if I were an alcoholic?" The vast majority of alcoholics are not down and out. It is very common to maintain a job and a semblance of family life whilst being dependent on alcohol.

"I don't drink spirits" Many alcoholics limit themselves to a particular drink, or drinking routine – but they still get drunk.

"I only drink at the moment because of some problems. I'll soon be better" This may seem true, but once you start relying on alcohol to cope with life you are going to find it increasingly difficult to go back to social drinking.



Relying on alcohol damages the people around you – especially children. For them it is like living with a time bomb.

Worried about someone



The distress of living with or being close to someone who drinks is rarely appreciated by those who have not had the same experience. You probably feel powerless, anxious, angry and even guilty. Often, the families of an alcoholic do not think of them in that way – their drinking is so familiar. It can be a great relief to realise the cause of so much fighting, irrational behaviour and turmoil. Children suffer from the unpredictable and possibly explosive atmosphere and partners can become obsessional about the drinker's problem – counting their units, looking for hidden bottles, feeling betrayed and hurt by each broken promise. In the end the drinking dominates family life.

what you can do

You are not completely powerless. Here are some constructive things you can do:

- confide in a friend or contact Al-Anon for support
- stop covering up, clearing up or making excuses for the drinker – this is called colluding and makes it easier for the drinker to continue
- don't hide or pour away alcohol – it won't achieve anything and treating someone as a child encourages childish behaviour
- don't feel responsible – adults are each responsible for their own actions
- don't join in the drinking
- do find out as much as possible about local resources and how they work – you will then be armed with the information to allay fears, dispel misconceptions and counter arguments
- avoid nagging or dropping hints or snide remarks – they are easy to ignore and builds up a pattern of resentment which is not constructive
- decide on a time to have a serious talk, perhaps after they have sobered up from a bad bout:
- be clear about the problems drink is causing
- be direct
- suggest positive action

They may get angry – this is a very common way to avoid a discussion. Try to maintain a non-confrontational discussion – if this proves impossible, you may need the help of friends, family, or your family doctor.

Physical danger

If you or any children are at risk, do something about it now.

Finding help

Alcohol Agencies

Check under Alcohol in your local Phone Book. They offer free and confidential advice, counselling and support from trained counsellors for anyone with concerns about their own or someone else's drinking. They can also refer to detox, day-care or residential rehabilitation.

AA

Alcoholics Anonymous: self-help organisation with local groups to support alcoholics wishing to recover. Information sent out on request.

Al-Anon & Al-Ateen 24 hr helpline

A network offering support to families and friends of alcoholics – whether they are in recovery or not. A way to meet and talk to people who have shared your experiences. Al-Ateen is geared specifically to those between 12 and 20. Publications relating to living with an alcoholic are also available.

Alcohol Concern

Offer literature about alcohol and how to control drinking. Can steer you to your nearest advice/treatment centre.

Care First

Available to all our users for confidential advice, counselling and help. We can also provide contact details for all the agencies on this list.

Childline

In the Phone Book. Children may phone about any problem.

Drinkline & Drinkline Youth

Offer telephone information, advice and support regarding your own drinking or someone else's.

Family Doctor

Some will be more helpful than others – if they don't seem sympathetic or knowledgeable, try another agency on this list.

Women's Aid Federation Helpline

Advice about domestic violence and women's refuges.

Care first provides a full range of confidential support, advice and information services to staff of participating employers. Our Information Specialists provide information and support on consumer issues, employment, benefits, housing, taxes and education as well as debt counselling.



A wide range of printed material is available including the following booklets:

Bereavement Checklists of the practical matters that have to be dealt with when someone dies. There is also an outline of the 'normal' path of grief.

Childcare A practical guide to finding the right childcare for your family, covering the options, the help available and checklists for interviewing.

Dealing with Debt There is often more leeway than you think. A step by step guide to assessing your position, dealing with creditors and creating a workable solution.

Drinking Drinking may affect your job, family or friends; or all three. Use the scorecard to assess drinking habits; and find help if you or someone you know needs it.

Elderly Relatives An elderly relative can be a source of concern – information and advice on managing accommodation, finances and funding.

Family Breakdown Advice on the decision to separate, the practical implications for now and the future.

Discuss these or any other issues in confidence. Call **Care first** free on **0800 174319** to speak to a Counsellor or an Information Specialist.