How many units are really in your drinks? Units tell us how much alcohol is in a drink. One unit is 10ml or 8g of pure alcohol.

Over recent years, alcoholic drinks have become bigger and stronger. One drink often contains as many as two or three units of alcohol.

In most pubs, bars and restaurants a small glass of wine is 175 ml while a large glass is 250 ml. Many pubs now serve spirits in 35 ml measures rather than the traditional 25 ml.

Alcoholic drinks have also been getting stronger. The average strength of wine is 12.5%, while lagers, ciders and beers are often stronger than 5%.

Below you can find out how many units there are in some common drinks.

- **2 units**
  - A pint of ordinary strength (3–4%) lager, cider or bitter

- **3 units**
  - A pint of premium strength (5–5.5%) lager, cider or extra strength bitter

- **9.5 units**
  - 1 bottle of wine (12.5%)

- **3 units**
  - A large 250 ml glass of wine (12.5%)

- **2 units**
  - A 175 ml glass of wine (12.5%)

- **Just under 3 units**
  - A large 2 x 35 ml double measure of spirits (40%) with or without a mixer

- **1 unit**
  - A small 25 ml single measure of spirits (40%) with or without a mixer

- **Just under 1.5 units**
  - A 275 ml bottle of alcopop (5%)
How does alcohol cause cancer?
Alcohol damages your cells
In the body, alcohol is changed into a chemical called acetaldehyde. This chemical causes hangovers, and it damages cells, which can cause cancer to develop.
Drinking alcohol increases the risk of cancer in many parts of the body it passes through including the mouth, throat and bowel.
Alcohol also causes cancer that starts in the liver. It can damage liver cells causing a disease called cirrhosis. This is a major cause of liver cancer.

Alcohol changes hormone levels in your body
Alcohol can affect levels of oestrogen in the body. This may be why alcohol increases the risk of breast cancer, which is linked to high levels of the hormone.

Alcohol worsens the dangers of smoking
Smoking increases the risk of many cancers. And research has found that people who smoke and drink increase the risk even further than only smoking or only drinking. This is because alcohol makes it easier for the harmful chemicals in tobacco smoke to be absorbed by the body.

How much can I drink safely?
Alcohol has a stronger effect on your risk of developing some types of cancer than others. Studies tell us that drinking small amounts of alcohol might have little effect on the risk of liver cancer, but a strong effect on mouth cancer risk. This makes it very difficult to recommend a single ‘safe’ level of drinking.
The common result in all studies of alcohol and cancer is that the more you drink, the greater the chance of developing cancer.
The more you cut down on alcohol, the more you reduce the risk of cancer.

There is no doubt that drinking alcohol increases the risk of cancer. Alcohol is linked to around 12,500 cancers in the UK each year and can cause seven different types of cancer.
The more alcohol you drink, the higher the risk of cancer.

In this leaflet you can find out about:
• what research tells us about the link between alcohol and cancer
• how to reduce the risk
• how many units of alcohol are in common drinks.

Alcohol and cancer in the headlines
Are some types of alcohol, like red wine, good for my health?
All alcoholic drinks – beer, wine and spirits – increase the risk of cancer. No type of alcohol is any better or worse than another.
Drinking small amounts of alcohol such as one small drink a day, has been shown to offer some protection for people at risk of heart disease. This normally applies to people over the age of 40.
However, drinking more alcohol doesn’t reduce the risk further – in fact it can increase the risk of stroke and high blood pressure as well as other conditions. Increasing the amount of alcohol you drink in order to improve your health is unlikely to work.

Is binge-drinking the real problem?
Research so far has looked mainly at the amount of alcohol people drink in total and the effect on cancer risk. Drinking a lot of alcohol increases the risk of cancer whether you drink it all in one session, or spread it over a week.