Drinking, you and your mates

HOW DOES YOUR NIGHT END?

ALCOHOL KNOW YOUR LIMITS

NHS

Home Office
How Does Alcohol Affect You?

For many of us, drinking alcohol is a part of life. But how much do you know about how alcohol affects your body, or how being drunk can affect people around us? How does your night end?

This leaflet will help you make choices about how much you drink. It tells you how alcohol can affect you, explains how you can stay safe when drinking and what to do if someone is in trouble after drinking too much. It’s not about stopping drinking, but it’s about making you aware of what some of the consequences could be of regular binge drinking and making sure alcohol plays a more positive part in your day-to-day life.
A few drinks at the weekend. You and your mates are out in town, having a laugh – anything could happen. That might be closer to the truth than you think. If you drink to get drunk, or drink more heavily than you’re used to, you can’t be sure what the effects could be.

**YOUR DRINKING CHOICES**

Regularly drinking more than the recommended amount of daily units or rapidly drinking too much in one go both have their risks.

It is recommend that you should not regularly drink more than:
- 3–4 units of alcohol a day for men,
- 2–3 units of alcohol a day for women.

‘Regularly’ means drinking every day or most days of the week.

If you drink more than this, the risks to your health and personal safety start to increase – especially if you regularly drink large amounts over a short period of time. Pregnant women and women trying to conceive should avoid alcohol altogether and never drink more than 1–2 units once or twice a week.

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**WOULD YOU TRASH THE PLACE IF THEY GOT YOUR ORDER WRONG?**

If you cause harassment whilst drunk you risk being made the subject of an anti-social behaviour order.
IT’S WHAT’S INSIDE THAT COUNTS

Drink Saturday night. Sleep it off Sunday morning. If drink was having a bad effect on your life, you’d know it, wouldn’t you? Not necessarily. Heavy drinking affects you now and in the future. And you might not be able to tell right now what harm you’re doing.

If you do find you’ve overdone it, keep off the booze for 48 hours to give your body time to recover and to minimise the risk of future harm.

It takes your liver an hour to process one unit of alcohol. So if you’re having two or three drinks an hour, you’re overloading your system and your health could suffer. In the shorter term, you may find yourself thrown out of the pub, in trouble with the police or making a visit to A&E to get patched up.

AVOIDING GETTING TOO DRUNK

- eat before you go out
- drink water regularly and before you go to bed after a night out
- alternate alcoholic drinks with soft drinks or water
- don’t try to keep up with friends who drink more than you
- try to avoid buying drinks in rounds
- if possible, sit down whilst you drink – you will drink less than you would standing up
- use more mixers – diluting a drink with another mixer will make it last longer and lessen the effects
- don’t mix alcohol with drugs – especially ecstasy or cocaine – it can be deadly
- if you’re on medication, ask your doctor if it’s okay to drink

The effects of alcohol build up in your body over time. So if you regularly drink more than the recommended daily amount, you could be setting yourself up for long-term health problems.
PROBLEMS YOU CAN'T SEE...

- sexual difficulties such as temporary impotence
- certain types of cancer, especially breast cancer
- memory loss and brain damage
- cirrhosis of the liver
- anxiety, stress, depression, poor concentration
- indigestion

...AND PROBLEMS YOU CAN SEE

If the way you look is important to you, you might want to consider how alcohol affects your appearance. All alcohol is heavy with calories. So the more you drink, the more likely you are to put on weight. Heavy drinking can also take a toll on your looks, give you skin problems and age you before your time.

WOULD YOU SQUAT DOWN AND PEE INTO THE GUTTER?

You can get an £80 fixed penalty for urinating in the street.
YOU WOULDN'T BEHAVE LIKE THAT SOBER

Ever been so drunk that you’re not sure how you got home? Or woken up the morning after and regretted making a fool of yourself? Maybe you can’t remember what you did. No matter how good a time you’re having when you’re drinking, it’s important to put the health and safety of you and your friends first. Plan ahead and keep within sensible levels of drinking to stay in control on a night out.

WHAT ARE THEY LAUGHING AT?

The more you drink, the easier it is to cross the line between being funny and being annoying. You might think that you’re the life and soul of the party, but can you be sure everybody’s laughing with you and not at you?

AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR

You might think you can control yourself, but you can’t control how others behave when they’re drunk. Young men are particularly vulnerable to violent attacks by other people who’ve been drinking. If you know you become aggressive when you drink, keep within your limits.

DID YOU KNOW?

Caffeine is a stimulant. Having a cup of coffee might make you feel more alert, but it does not make you sober.

SEX

That person you’re pulling might look gorgeous after you’ve had a few drinks. But what about in the morning? And can you be sure you’ll use a condom? Unprotected sex can lead to unintended pregnancies or sexually transmitted infections like chlamydia, gonorrhoea or HIV. Make sure you’re both up for it – If you don’t have a firm ‘yes’ it’s legally rape and you could be charged. Women are most at risk from sexual assaults, either from strangers or guys they have met over the course of an evening drinking.

Don’t be surprised if you can’t perform after a heavy night drinking; alcohol acts as an anaesthetic and makes it harder to achieve an erection or orgasm. Over time, heavy drinking can lead to impotence, smaller genitals and a lower sperm count.
**SPIKED DRINKS**

Both women and men are at risk of their drinks being spiked. Watch your drink being poured, keep your drink with you and watch out for your friends. Don’t accept a drink from someone you don’t know and trust and don’t share or swap drinks. And if you suddenly feel odd or unusually drunk, ask someone you really trust to get you home safely. Remember, although you need to watch out for drugs, it’s more likely someone will sneak vodka into your drink or buy you a double when you ask for a single.

**INJURIES**

If you’re so drunk that you’re dizzy or falling over, you could do yourself a serious injury. Pedestrians who are killed or injured in road accidents have often been drinking.

** LOSING YOUR STUFF AND GETTING ROBBED**

Remember, after a few drinks you’re more likely to lose things, particularly money and door keys which can prevent you getting home safely.
Worse still, you’re setting yourself up as easy prey for robbers. Women feel most in danger walking down the street, yet it’s blokes who are more likely to get mugged.

**KEEPING YOU SAFE**
- at the start of an evening, plan how you’ll get home – keep enough money to pay for the journey home or agree who will drive and not drink
- don’t accept drinks from strangers
- don’t leave your drink unattended
- don’t get into an unlicensed cab or a stranger’s car
- don’t get into a car with a driver who’s been drinking
- don’t leave your friends to go off with someone you don’t know
- avoid aggressive drinkers – walk away if someone seems to be getting too rowdy
- avoid walking home alone or through dark, unsafe areas
- if you think you’re being followed, cross over the road to see if they follow – if you’re still worried don’t hang about, get to a public place and call a mate to meet you, or the police
- you won’t hear someone come up behind you if you’re chatting on your phone or listening to your personal stereo
- if you are attacked, your best bet is to shout and run
- when your instinct says there’s trouble ahead, there probably is, so get somewhere safe
- carry a condom – if you have sex, make sure you don’t take unnecessary risks.

**KEEPING YOUR THINGS SAFE**
- keep your belongings with you at all times
- don’t leave things like your purse, wallet or keys lying around on the pub table
- keep bags closed, zipped up and buckled
- be extra careful with rucksacks – if someone grabs it, let it go
- don’t flash cash around – keep it in your pocket
- if you use a cash machine, choose one that’s well lit
- if you take your mobile out with you, keep it hidden and make any calls brief.
OVER THE LIMIT?

There are laws to stop people who are under 18 buying alcohol and to encourage responsible behaviour when you’re drinking. So make sure that a night out with your mates doesn’t end up with you getting into trouble with the police. Getting a fine or criminal record could also affect your career opportunities or prevent you from entering some countries.

Bear in mind, too, that what you do when you’re drunk doesn’t just affect you. It affects the friends you’re with, the people in the local area and the emergency services who might be called to deal with a situation you get involved in – when they could be helping someone else.

DON’T DRINK AND DRIVE

The advice for drinking and driving is simple – don’t do it. Any amount of alcohol in your blood will affect your ability to drive. Even if you think you feel fine. The legal limit for driving is 80mg of alcohol in 100ml of blood. You can’t translate that into a number of drinks easily – it depends on factors such as your age, gender, weight and metabolism, so it’s much easier to have nothing to drink than to try to calculate how much is safe and risk being over the limit.

DRIVING THE MORNING AFTER

It might not be safe to drive the day after a big night out – alcohol stays in your system for some time. Lots of people have been found to have broken the drink drive laws the day after a drinking session.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drink</th>
<th>ABV</th>
<th>Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lager pint</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beer pint</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cider pint</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3.4</td>
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The ABV (alcohol by volume) shows what percentage of a drink is pure alcohol – the higher the percentage, the stronger the drink,