Your drink & you
What kind of a drinker am I?

Some people don’t drink at all or drink very rarely, perhaps at family occasions like weddings or christenings. Others may drink only at weekends or a few times a week, perhaps with food, or as part of a night out. Then there are people who drink heavily every day and those who ‘binge’ or get drunk on a regular basis.

Whether you identify with one of these drinking types or feel ‘somewhere in between’, it is useful to know just how alcohol can affect you.

To stay healthy and avoid problems it makes sense to drink in moderation.

Daily benchmarks for sensible drinking

The benchmarks measure alcohol in units to help people work out whether their drinking might be risky. The guidelines for women are lower because they are generally smaller and lighter than men, their bodies contain less water, and have a different metabolism. The benchmarks do not apply to young people who haven’t yet reached physical maturity or pregnant women.

Doctors recommend that on any occasion when you drink, you stick within the benchmarks shown here.

Most people enjoy alcohol and most of the time it’s not a problem. But drinking too much or at the wrong time can be harmful. This booklet gives you the facts about alcohol and encourages you to think about the part it plays in your life.
So what exactly is a unit? Some drinks contain more alcohol than others. One unit is the same as 8g or 10ml (1cl) of pure alcohol. Check out the number of units in the following drinks:

There is One UNIT in:
- Half a pint of standard strength beer, lager or cider (3.5 or 4% vol.)
- A small glass of lower strength wine (8 or 9% vol.)
- A single 25ml (small) shot of spirits (40% vol.)
- A sip of overproofed rum at 70% vol.

There are Two UNITS in:
- A large can of standard strength lager, cider or beer (3.5 or 4% vol.)
- A large rum, brandy or other spirit (40% vol.)
- One 330ml bottle of lager (5.5% vol.)
- A large glass of wine at 11 or 12% vol.

There are Four UNITS in:
- A large can of strong lager (8 or 9% vol.)

There are thirty units in a 75cl bottle of spirit (40% vol.)

Using this guide you can work out how many units are in your usual drink and how your drinking compares to the recommendations.

Some drinks are more difficult to convert into units - mixed drinks like cocktails or punch for example. Overproofed rums are also tricky as they can be anything between 40% and 70% vol.
Alcohol can have a bad effect on your health, damaging many of the body’s organs. It can lead to liver disease and some cancers and it raises blood pressure. As blood pressure goes up so does the risk of coronary heart disease and some kinds of stroke. Some people also put on weight as alcohol has no nutritional value but is high in calories.

not only that but...

Most of us would never dream of drinking and driving but it’s not just driving that can be affected by drink. Alcohol also makes people vulnerable to other accidents and increases the chances of people becoming aggressive. Having arguments can spoil a special occasion. At certain times of the week, up to eight out of ten admissions to accident and emergency departments are related to alcohol.

People who drink very heavily can also develop psychological and emotional problems including depression. Heavy drinking can also lead to dependency which can be very hard to overcome, similar to nicotine or other drug addiction.

Most of these problems, with their devastating effects on families as well as individuals, can be avoided.

One-off drinking sessions

Some people don’t drink very often but go for it in a big way every so often, perhaps at carnival time or at a family celebration. This may seem less harmful than regular drinking but one-off sessions can also cause problems - the worst cases resulting in alcohol poisoning and even death. Drink slows reaction times making accidents more likely.

A big session will also put a strain on your body; it will make you dehydrated and feel ill and hungover afterwards. If you do drink too much then alcohol should be avoided for 48 hours to give your body a chance to recover.

Drunkenness is a factor in a lot of violent behaviour. Incidents of domestic violence and child abuse are also often linked to the misuse of alcohol.
DID YOU KNOW...

There are many misconceptions about alcohol and its effects, not to mention numerous legendary cures for the age-old problem of the hangover. Here are some hard facts to dispel some of the myths...

MYTH

Once you've slept it off you're fine to drive

Black coffee cures a hangover

People who drink red wine tend to live longer

The best cure for a hangover is that old favourite Hair of The Dog (more of what you had the night before)

A liquid lunch will keep you slim

FACT

It takes one hour for your liver to remove each unit of alcohol from your system. So if you drink heavily in the evening you could still be over the legal drink drive limit the following morning.

Only time can remove alcohol from your bloodstream, no amount of black coffee, cold showers or fresh air will sober you up.

Small amounts (one to two units) of any alcohol can help protect against coronary heart disease but (here's the 'catch') only if you are male and over 40 or you are a woman who has been through the menopause.

More alcohol will only continue putting strain on your liver. Your body needs time to readjust. Be kind to your body and avoid alcohol for 48 hours.

The opposite. Alcohol is high in calories with no food value. You can put on weight and be short of nutrients.