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## Alcohol and You booklet

If alcohol is causing you problems, we can help you to manage and cut down the amount you are drinking.

For many of us, drinking with friends and family is one of life's pleasures. But for some people, their drinking can lead to longer-term health problems. If you regularly drink more than the recommended daily amount, it can cause health risks that you can't see.

In January 2016 the recommendations for levels of drinking changed. The Chief Medical Officer reported that there is now stronger evidence of the risks of cancers, especially breast cancer, which increases directly in-line with consumption of alcohol.

### **Why cut down?**

#### **All types of alcoholic drinks can cause cancer**

The new guideline on alcohol consumption warns that drinking any level of alcohol increases the risk of a range of cancers including:

- mouth
- bowel
- stomach
- liver
- breast

So how do you know if you're drinking at harmful levels? We will help you find this out and provide useful advice to help you cut down. You'll discover how many units of alcohol there are in your drinks so you can be informed about your drinking levels.

In the 6-step plan, we'll give you ideas on how to drink less and reduce the risks without missing out on the fun you have with family and friends:

Step 1- Think of some good reasons to change.

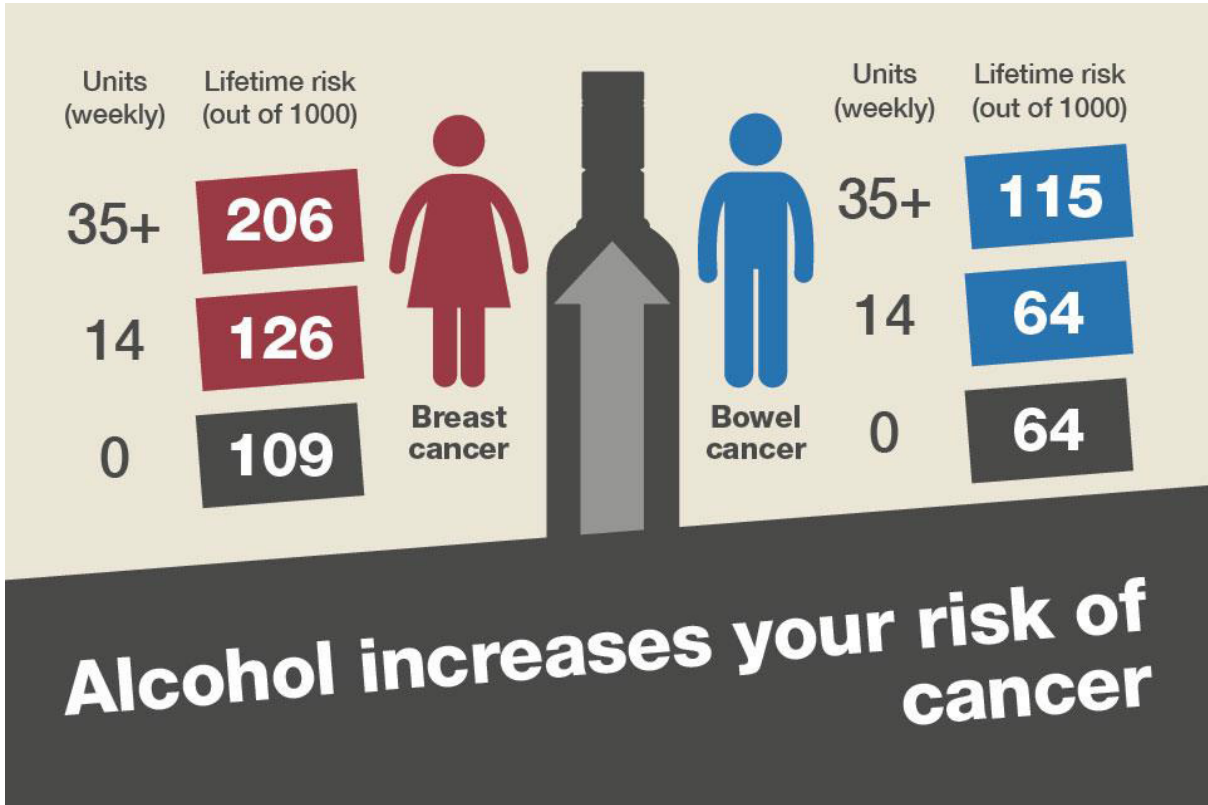
Step 2- Set your goals.

Step 3- Know when you might slip up.

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

Step 5- Find support if you need it.

Step 6- Stick to your goals.



**Know your units**

Here’s a visual guide to how much alcohol there is in some popular drinks. You can refer back to it later when you’re working out how much you usually drink. And it’ll probably come in handy in the future too.



Many manufacturers now put the number of alcohol units on bottles and cans, so this can be a useful reference. Of course with mixed drinks like cocktails it can be hard to keep track of what you’re drinking – you can always ask the person serving you if you’re not sure.

## Drinking at home

At home it can be much more difficult to keep track of how much you're drinking than when you're out. There are no measures, you're probably much more generous than bars or pubs are, and you can top up your glass at any time.

Keep it in mind – that vodka you just poured might be a quadruple measure rather than the single measure you'd get in the local pub.

### Just remember

- The visual guide gives examples, but many popular drinks are stronger.
- Some pubs serve spirits in 35 ml measures rather than 25 ml, so you might be drinking more than you realise.
- Glasses and bottles come in different sizes so this is going to affect the number of units you're drinking.

 <p>PINT LAGER 4% ABV</p> <p><b>2.3 UNITS</b></p>	 <p>PINT BITTER 5% ABV</p> <p><b>2.8 UNITS</b></p>	 <p>PINT OF STRONG BEER/LAGER /CIDER 5.2% ABV</p> <p><b>3 UNITS</b></p>	 <p>500ml CAN OF LAGER 3.8% ABV</p> <p><b>1.9 UNITS</b></p>	 <p>25ml SINGLE SPIRIT AND MIXER 40% ABV</p> <p><b>1 UNIT</b></p>	 <p>50ml DOUBLE SPIRIT AND MIXER 40% ABV</p> <p><b>2 UNITS</b></p>
 <p>750ml BOTTLE OF WINE 13.5% ABV</p> <p><b>10 UNITS</b></p>	 <p>175ml GLASS OF RED OR WHITE WINE 13% ABV</p> <p><b>2.3 UNITS</b></p>	 <p>250ml GLASS OF RED OR WHITE WINE 13% ABV</p> <p><b>3.3 UNITS</b></p>	 <p>50ml GLASS FORTIFIED WINE (E.G. SHERRY) 20% ABV</p> <p><b>1 UNIT</b></p>	 <p>275ml BOTTLE ALCO-POP 5% ABV</p> <p><b>1.4 UNITS</b></p>	 <p>50ml IRISH CREAM LIQUEUR 20% ABV</p> <p><b>1 UNIT</b></p>

## So what did you drink last week?

How much did you drink last week? Have a think about it – maybe you spent a few evenings in the pub, and on some days you had drinks at home. Use the table below to add up your drinks this week. Refer back to 'know your units' for a guide.

Please be honest with yourself – to get the best advice to look after your health it's important to be as accurate as you can. Also, if last week was unusual for you – e.g. you drank much more or less than usual – write down what you'd drink in a normal week.

	Drink type	Number of units
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		
Total for week		

***Which category are you?***

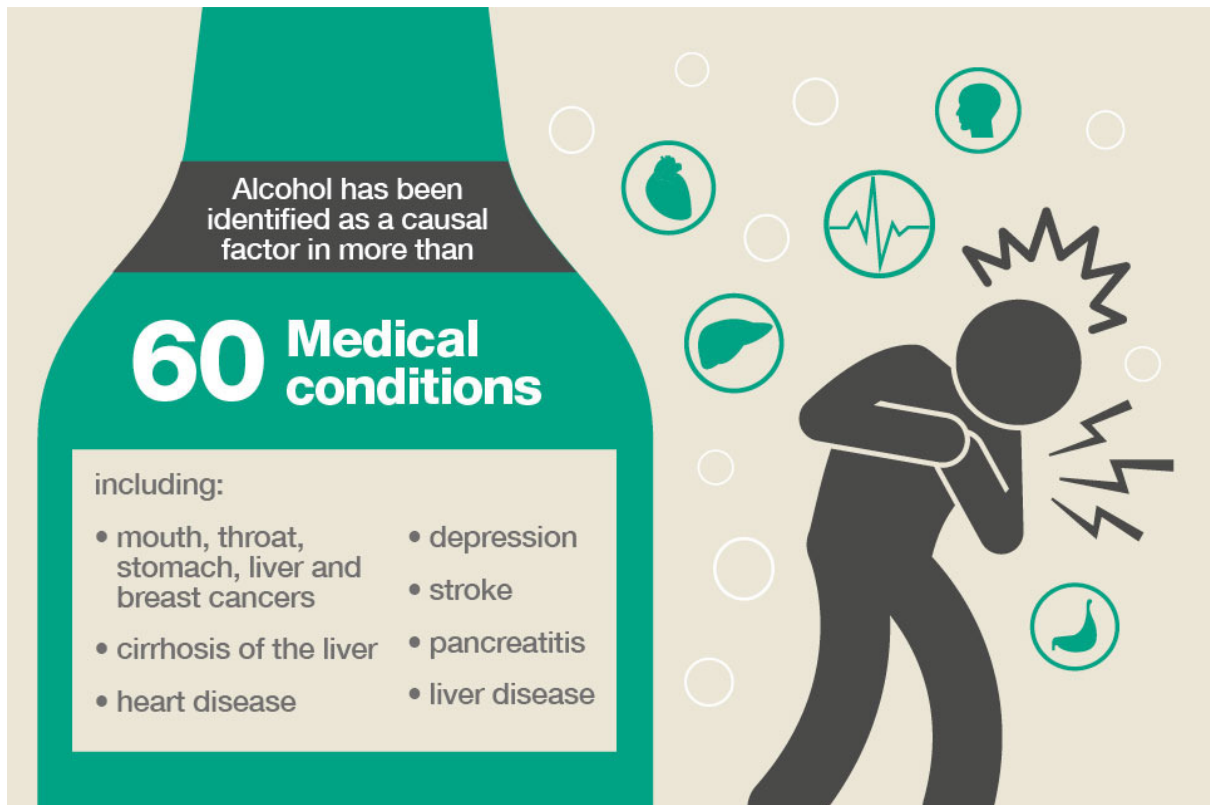
Add up a total for the week \_\_\_\_\_

***If its 14 units or under***

There are no safe levels when drinking alcohol however you are currently drinking within the guidance of up to 14 units a week. If you continue to drink within the units you will have a lower risk of getting an alcohol related medical condition.

***If it's 15 units or over***

You are over the recommended limit of 14 units, if you continue to drink at this level you will increase your risk of over 60 medical conditions. Please read on to find out how you can reduce your intake.



To help you work out if you're drinking more than is good for you, why not download a mobile units calculator. You can download it free of charge by visiting [www.nhs.uk/alcohol](http://www.nhs.uk/alcohol).

### ***Drinking within the recommendations***

- Men and women should not regularly drink more than 14 units of alcohol a week. Ideally, this should be spread evenly over three days or more.
- Drinkers should limit the amount they consume on single occasions, and intersperse drinking alcohol with eating food and drinking water.

### **Should I try to cut down my drinking?**

Are you surprised or even shocked to find yourself over the recommendations, you might need to lower your alcohol intake and so reduce the current risk of harm to your health. Carry on reading to be taken through a 6-step plan to help you reduce your drinking.

By the way, most people just need to cut down their drinking, but there are people who need to stop completely. Please take a look at the information below before you move on to the 6-step plan.

### ***Drinking within the guidelines?***

If you're in the lower risk category, you probably don't need to take any action, unless you have good reasons to cut down yourself or you are drinking the full 14 units all in one go.

## **Some people need to stop completely**

*You may need to plan to stop drinking completely if:*

- You have a health problem, like liver or heart disease.
- You commonly have memory blackouts, so you can't remember things that happened when you were drinking.

If you have answered yes to any one of these you should seek professional help for your drinking, speak to a GP or nurse for advice.

*You should stop drinking completely if:*

- You are pregnant or thinking of becoming pregnant.
- You are taking medication that doesn't mix with drinking (ask your doctor)
- You think your life would be better if you didn't drink at all

### *Medical warning*

*If you have physical withdrawal symptoms (like shaking, sweating or feeling anxiety until you have a first drink of the day), you should take medical advice before stopping completely – as it can be dangerous to do this too quickly without proper advice and support.*

## **The 6-step plan**

You now know quite a lot about the effects of alcohol and the problems it can cause to your health and personal life. And hopefully you've made a decision to try to cut your drinking to within the recommendations. The 6-step plan can help you to cut down. It won't always be easy. However, thousands of people like you have succeeded – and feel much better for it.

### ***Step 1 – Think of some good reasons to change***

There are plenty of good reasons to cut down your drinking – here are some examples, and you can probably think of more

#### ***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 have arguments 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 serious health problems such as heart and liver disease.

Complete the box below with your 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 drinking within the recommendations– but we know it might take a bit of time to get there. So first things first. Make a plan for the next four weeks and set goals you can stick to. Choose your goals from one or more of these boxes.

Then to see if your goals are realistic, give each one a score from one to ten.

**1 – I'd be really lucky to achieve this**

**10 – I know I can do this**

Tick box		Score 1 to 10
	I will not drink more than ___ units each day.	
	I will not spend more than ___ on alcohol each week.	
	I will have ___ alcohol-free days a week.	
	I will decide how much I'm going to drink before I start drinking.	
	I will take up a new hobby or activity to do at the time I usually drink most.	
	I will (add your own in here if you like)	

### 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 for goals you're more likely to achieve. Your goals should help you make a good start at drinking less, and they should be realistic too.

So for the next four weeks, try and stick to your goals. We recommend you use the Unit Tracker you can download it from [www.nhs.uk/tools/pages/drinks-tracker.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/tools/pages/drinks-tracker.aspx) or use the manual one below.

**Drinks tracker**

Use this drink tracker manually if you do not wish to download the tracker.

	Goal units	Drinks	Actual units
Day 1			
Day 2			
Day 3			
Day 4			
Day 5			
Day 6			
Day 7			
		Total	

	Goal units	Drinks	Actual units
Day 1			
Day 2			
Day 3			
Day 4			
Day 5			
Day 6			
Day 7			
		Total	

	Goal units	Drinks	Actual units
Day 1			
Day 2			
Day 3			
Day 4			
Day 5			
Day 6			
Day 7			
		Total	

	Goal units	Drinks	Actual units
Day 1			
Day 2			
Day 3			
Day 4			
Day 5			
Day 6			
Day 7			
		Total	



### 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's easy to slip up and drink too much. It might be on social occasions, or when you're stressed, everybody's different.

Think for a moment about the last few times you were drinking too much. Where were you, who were you with and what were you feeling? Here's a list of times we can all relate to – tick the ones you think are most relevant to you. You can add any more you think of in the space below.

- When your boss is buying the drinks after work.
- When you're meeting new people in social situations and feel 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 you're 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.

Add your own in the box below. I might slip up.....

1.
2.
3.

### Step 4 – Plan now for the times you might slip up

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

Choose three situations when you're most likely to slip up – for instance at a party, after a stressful meeting at work, or going to watch the football.

Then look at the ideas on how to deal with them – you can probably think of more ideas that would work for you. Write down your two best ways of coping with these situations in the box.

#### 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 leaving 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 to alcohol when it's offered to you.
- If you're going out with people who drink heavily, try to avoid buying in rounds (you could always get the first round 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.

### **Coping with the times I might slip up**

Situation 1	
Way of coping 1	
Way of coping 2	

Situation 2	
Way of coping 1	
Way of coping 2	

Situation 3	
Way of coping 1	
Way of coping 2	

Every day, think about the times you might slip up. Then imagine yourself using your coping strategies to deal with them. Do you feel that one or two of them won't work? Then change them for better ones.

### **Step 5 – Find support if you need it**

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 someone for support.

Choose someone you can talk to easily, be honest with and get advice from when you need it. It could be your partner, a friend, a colleague or someone else you know who wants to cut down their drinking. Don't be scared to ask – they'll probably be pleased to help.

## **Step 6 – Stick to your goals**

Enjoying alcohol is a part of many people's lives, and sometimes it's hard to break the habit of drinking too much. But just reading this leaflet means you've already taken a step towards lowering your level of drinking, so well done.

If you take it seriously, the 6-step plan really can help break the habit and change your level of drinking. But you're only human – there's likely to be the odd setback along the way, so don't be discouraged if you have a bad day, or even a bad week! Start the 6 steps again if you need to – just take it one day at a time, and gradually it will get easier

### ***Enjoy a healthy lifestyle and lower risk drinking***

If you drink less, your lifestyle will have changed for the better and you'll have more time and energy for the things and the people you love. Of course your ultimate goal is to be in the lower risk drinking category. So after following the 6 steps for four weeks, have a look at how you're doing. You may want to update or change your goals, to help you get closer to achieving lower risk drinking.

***Nobody's perfect – if at first you don't succeed, try again.***

### ***Medical warning***

***Important – If you have physical withdrawal symptoms (like shaking, sweating or feelings of anxiety until you have a first drink of the day), you should take medical advice before stopping completely – as it can be dangerous to do this too quickly without proper advice and support.***

### **Finding it tough?**

There's always local help available

- Atlantic Recovery Centre Substance Misuse (18 years old and over),  
• **Telephone 01384 426 120**  
• <http://www.cri.org.uk>
- SWITCH – Young Person Substance Misuse Service  
(under 18 years old), **telephone 01384 241 440**  
• <http://www.cranstoun.org/>  
• For further local advice visit: [www.thinkalcohol.com](http://www.thinkalcohol.com)
- There are also [www.nhs.uk/alcohol](http://www.nhs.uk/alcohol) and [www.drinkaware.co.uk](http://www.drinkaware.co.uk) which are national websites with lots of information on alcohol.