

Alcohol Advice and Information

For immediate advice and/or information
on where to go for help within
your region call:

Drink line: 0800 917 82 82



This brief intervention package is based on the Drink-Less programme originally developed at the University of Sydney as part of a W.H.O. collaborative study.

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How Much is Too Much?

Patient Booklet



Introduction

For many people, having a drink with friends is one of the pleasures of life. However, for others drinking leads to a variety of problems. This is because they drink too much, too often.

Alternatively they may drink too much in settings that put them at risk of harm, such as drink driving.

So how can you decide if you drink too much, too often? Firstly, you need to work out the number of **standard drinks** or units of alcohol you usually have.

When people talk about a **standard drink** they are referring to:



A half pint of ordinary strength (4% ABV) beer, lager or cider.



1 small glass of wine (8 - 10% ABV in a 125ml glass).



1 single pub measure of spirits or aperitifs

*ABV = Alcohol by Volume

Drinks Planner/Diary Photocopy this page for your use

Week _____	Planned Drinks	Actual Drinks
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		
Week Total		

Week _____	Planned Drinks	Actual Drinks
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		
Week Total		

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Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		
Week Total		

Step 5

Find Support

This plan is all about changing your habits. Some people find this easier if they have someone to help them.

Your support person should be someone you can talk to easily, be honest with and ask advice from when you need it. This person could be a partner, a friend, a colleague or someone who also wants to change their drinking habits.

The most important thing is **don't be afraid to ask for support**. If you can't think of anyone that you can talk to, ask your doctor or nurse.

Step 6

Stick to your goals

Enjoying alcohol is a part of many people's lives - a habit which they would feel lost without. This type of habit is hard to break...

The information in this booklet and the things you have written down will help you change your drinking habits. **Remember** that every time you stop yourself from doing something by habit, you are one step nearer to breaking the habit altogether.

If you find yourself having one or two drinks too many, don't be discouraged or feel like you have failed - you're still well ahead of where you were when you first started reading this booklet. Don't give in just because you've had a bad day. Take one day at a time and gradually it will get easier.

Remember, nobody's perfect...
If at first you don't succeed, try again!

But remember:

- Many commonly available drinks are stronger than these
- Glass and bottle sizes can vary
- Home measures are rarely the same as pub measures

Some examples:



1 Pint of Premium Beer/Lager
5% ABV



330ml Bottle of Alco-Pop
5% ABV



175ml Glass of Wine
13% ABV



50ml Measure of Sherry or Port
20% ABV



440ml can Super Strength Lager
9% ABV



750ml Bottle of Wine
12% ABV

To help you decide if you are drinking too much, work out how many **standard drinks** you have in an average week and compare this amount with the safe limits set out below:

- **For Men** the recommended limit is 3 - 4 standard drinks per day and no more than 21 standard drinks per week.
- **For women** the recommended limit is 2 - 3 standard drinks per day and no more than 14 standard drinks per week.

If you regularly drink above these safe limits you may have already experienced problems such as feelings of tiredness, gaining extra weight, getting hangovers or experiencing periods of memory loss (blackouts).

Overall you're probably in worse physical shape. You may even embarrass yourself or others after you have been drinking or have unnecessary arguments with those around you. In the future you can develop more severe problems such as high blood pressure, brain damage or liver disease.

Sometimes you have to be extra careful even when you drink below the safe limits. Two standard drinks is too much if you are going to drive, operate machinery or exercise (e.g. swim, run). Always remember, if you are caught driving over the legal limit you will lose your license.



Ways of coping with difficult times

- Avoid going to the pub after work. Arrange a different social activity like sport or the cinema.
- Avoid friends who drink heavily and practice refusing alcohol.
- Avoid situations in which you would normally drink a lot.
- Plan activities or tasks at times you would usually be drinking.
- When bored or stressed try to go for a walk instead of drinking
- Have a non-alcoholic drink before each alcoholic drink.
- Don't drink alcohol when thirsty and avoid salty snacks - they make you thirsty.
- Eat a meal before drinking, it will make you feel more full and you will drink less.
- Avoid drinking in rounds.
- Switch to lower alcohol products or dilute your drinks with a mixer.

My high risk times

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 _____

At certain times each day **imagine each of your high risk situations**. For each of these, imagine yourself using your coping strategies. In practice you may find some of your strategies don't work. If so, you can always go back to your list and work on new ideas.

Step ③

Recognise difficult times

No matter how much you may want to change your drinking habits, there will be times when you will find it difficult. We call these **high risk times**.

Think for a moment about the last few times you were drinking too much. Where were you and what were you feeling? The following is a list of common high risk times:

- After work
- When meeting new people in social situations
- When celebrating at a party or club
- When you've had a hard day
- When you need to relax
- When watching television
- When you are lonely or depressed

Step ④

Prepare for difficult times

Thinking about the hardest times for you means you know when you're most likely to drink heavily. Now you have to work out how to cope with these situations.

Choose a situation you feel is high risk.

Think of ways to deal with this situation and write them down on a piece of paper. You can get some ideas from the list overleaf.

Pick the two ideas that you think are the most practical in this situation.

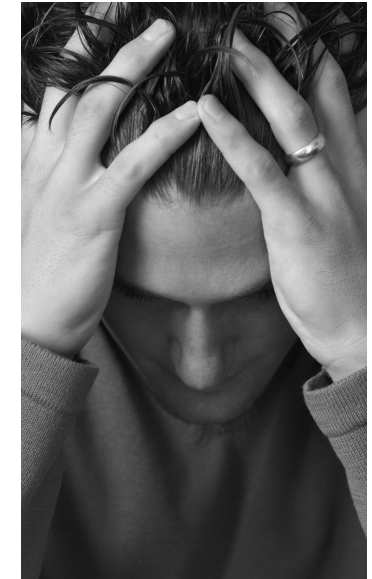
Now repeat this process for other high risk situations you find yourself facing and record them overleaf.

Should I cut down or stop?

Most people who drink too much just need to cut down. Some need to stop completely. It is important that you **stop** drinking if:

- You regularly get early morning shakes after you have been drinking.
- You have a health problem, like liver or heart disease .
- You sometimes have blackouts or difficulty remembering things after drinking.

A **yes** to any one of these questions means you should seek professional help for your drinking.



The Six Step Plan

After reading this far you know quite a lot about the effects of alcohol and the problems they can cause to your health and personal life.

In the rest of this booklet we have laid out a six step plan that you can follow to help you to cut down. It won't always be easy. However, thousands of people before you have succeeded and feel much better for it.

You can do it...

Step ①

Identify good reasons for change

Deciding on a good reason for changing your habits will help you succeed. What we mean by a **good reason** is one that makes sense to you.

Right now think of some good reasons for changing your habits. To get you started we have listed some examples:

- 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 will be less likely to have arguments with those around you.
- You'll sleep better.
- Your children will be less likely to become drinkers.
- You'll have more energy.
- You'll lose weight.
- Your memory will be better for much longer.
- You will be less likely to develop high blood pressure.
- You'll be less likely to develop serious health problems such as heart and liver disease

You can probably think of other reasons too. Which ones make the most sense to you? Pick your three best reasons for cutting down your drinking and write them below:

1

2

3

Step ②

Set your goals

Having a plan for changing your drinking means you need to set goals to work towards.

Pick a day when you are going to start and set a drinking goal. Next, make a record of your drinking. This will help you work out whether you are keeping on track. We have included a weekly diary plan to help you. Write your starting date on the top of your first diary box and record your drinks over the week.

Example of a completed diary

This woman managed to have a drink free day but needs to be careful at the weekend.

Week <i>2-8 Oct</i>	Planned Drinks	Actual Drinks
Monday	2	2
Tuesday	3	3
Wednesday	0	2
Thursday	2	0
Friday	3	5
Saturday	2	2
Sunday	2	3
Week Total	14	17

We have included a weekly diary to help you. Try making a plan and record your drinks over the next week. See page 10 for extra diary pages that you can photocopy.

Week _____	Planned Drinks	Actual Drinks
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		
Week Total		