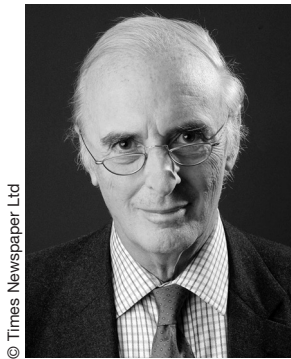


Alcohol and You

Frequently asked questions



www.drinkingandyou.com



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Nine out of ten people in Britain drink alcohol regularly, if in some cases only occasionally. In moderate quantities even a daily drink is likely to improve, rather than damage, health and to increase someone's expected lifespan. The list of diseases and conditions that benefit from small quantities of alcohol is surprising and the number of those in which alcohol is forbidden is remarkably low.

The problem that confronts parents, doctors, police and the social services is how to organise life in the UK so that the benefits of a drink are not denied to most people because a minority abuse it. One of the government's suggestions is for more information to be provided by those who sell alcohol. This booklet should do just that.

Dr. Thomas Stuttaford

Medical Correspondent to The Times and General Practitioner




Most people enjoy drinking and find it both relaxing and sociable. For the majority of adults, drinking in moderation as part of a healthy lifestyle should not cause any problems and there can even be health benefits. However, there are times when drinking too much – or at all – can be harmful and even dangerous. Sensible drinking is knowing where the benefits end and the risks begin.

This guide hopes to answer some frequently asked questions, such as how much is too much, what is sensible drinking and is drinking in moderation really good for you?



How is alcohol measured?

Alcohol is measured in units, with a standard unit in the UK equalling 8g or 10ml of pure alcohol. However, one drink doesn't automatically equal one unit. For example, a small glass of wine (at 12% av) equals 1.5 units, while half a pint of beer (at 4% abv) equals 1.1 units. The chart at the bottom of the page outlines the unit content of some typical measures of popular drinks. Many drinks now carry unit information on the packaging, and many supermarkets display the unit content of popular drinks on their shelves.

<p>Government advice on sensible drinking for adults</p> <p>Men: 3-4 units per day Women: 2-3 units per day</p> <p> 330ml bottle of beer at 5% alcohol = 1.7 units</p> <p> 125ml glass of wine at 12% alcohol = 1.5 units</p> <p> 25ml measure of spirits at 40% alcohol = 1 unit</p>	<p>IT IS AN OFFENCE TO PURCHASE OR ATTEMPT TO PURCHASE ALCOHOL IF YOU ARE UNDER THE AGE OF 18 (section 147 Licensing Act 2003)</p> <p>PROOF OF AGE MAY BE REQUESTED</p> <p><small>WIN1025 PD</small></p>
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Unit calculator

Wine (av)	125ml (small glass)	175ml (standard glass)
12% av	1.5 units	2.1 units
14%	1.75 units	2.45 units

Beer (abv)	Half pint	Pint
4%	1.1 units	2.2 units
5%	1.4 units	2.8 units

Spirits (abv)	25ml (single)	50ml (double)
40%	1 unit	2 units

How many units can I drink?

It is difficult to specify exactly what constitutes moderate or sensible consumption, as this is dependent on your age, size, sex, health and how and when you consume alcohol; the speed of consumption and whether or not you drink it with food – all will affect the absorption of alcohol.

The Government defines sensible drinking as 3-4 units for men and 2-3 units for women a day. These guidelines are daily totals as it is harmful to 'save up' your units. Binge drinking over one or two nights can lead to health problems and antisocial behaviour.

The guidelines* do not apply to under 18s or people with medical conditions who may be affected by alcohol. If in any doubt, consult your GP.

**Set out in the Government's document 'Sensible Drinking' – the report of an Inter-departmental Working Group (1995).*

What if I drink too much?

The short-term risks of excess drinking are well known and include alcohol poisoning, passing out and loss of memory, unprotected sex, an increased risk of becoming a victim of crime, and of course, the inevitable hangover.

Effects of long term heavy drinking include a greater risk of cancer and many other serious illnesses, including alcoholism.

When should I not drink at all?

There are certain situations in which the consumption of alcohol is unwise and dangerous.

DON'T

- Drink and drive
- Operate machinery, use electrical equipment or work at heights after drinking
- Drink heavily before playing sport
- Drink while on certain medications – ask your doctor if you are unsure
- Drink while pregnant. It may harm your unborn child.
- Drink if you have a history of alcohol or drug abuse – obvious, but this advice is often ignored.

Drinking and driving

In the UK the legal limit for driving is 80mg of alcohol in 100ml of blood. However, the only safe option when driving is not to drink at all. When drinking with friends, nominate a non-drinking driver or take a taxi, bus or train home.

The amount of alcohol in your bloodstream is known as your BAC (blood alcohol concentration).

Men

A man's BAC will generally increase by 20mg for each standard drink. A man's liver will break down approximately one drink (ie half a pint of lager) an hour.

Women

A woman's BAC increases by between 20mg to 30mg for each standard drink. A woman's liver will only break down three quarters of a unit an hour.

Drinking with food slows the absorption of alcohol into your body. However, on a full stomach alcohol will stay in your system for a longer period of time. Because it takes time for your body to break down alcohol, drinking more than one unit per hour will build up your BAC and it can be many hours before you are safe to drive. After a night of heavy drinking, many people are still over the limit in the morning.

Driving abroad

The UK has some of the toughest penalties on drink/driving in the world. If you're caught over the limit you face an automatic driving ban of 12 months and a possible fine of up to £5,000 and/or six months in prison.

It is also important to check drink/drive limits when abroad because they may be lower than in the UK. Most of Europe has a lower drink/drive level of 50mg while Sweden and Norway only tolerate 20mg.

Young people and alcohol

It is important that children are given accurate and balanced advice about alcohol and that you set them a good example. Introducing older teenagers to alcohol gradually can have a positive effect on their future drinking habits. Adults are not allowed to buy alcohol for under 18s in licensed premises. However, under current licensing laws, the only exception is that 16 and 17 year olds are allowed to drink beer, wine or cider during a meal with adults on licensed premises. Young people may not buy the alcohol themselves.

It is illegal to give an alcoholic drink to a child under the age of five except under medical supervision in an emergency. Over the age of five it is legal for anyone to drink alcohol (for example in your own home) although restrictions apply to purchasing drink and the police have powers to confiscate alcohol from under 18s drinking in public spaces such as the street or in parks.

Teenagers

- If they are partying at friends' houses or at home, make sure adults are present and that drinks are supervised.
- It is important for young people to appreciate the different amounts of alcohol in different drinks, especially spirits.
- Encourage them to pace themselves by alternating alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks; to eat when they are drinking; or to eat before going out.
- Explain how excessive drinking may affect friendships and social life and result in antisocial behaviour.
- Tell them not to accept drinks from strangers and never to leave drink unattended in case they are 'spiked'.

Your very good health

Scientific findings* have concluded that the moderate consumption of alcohol is not only relaxing and enjoyable, but could reduce mortality rates among men over 40 and post-menopausal women for whom the risk factors for heart disease and strokes increase significantly. Statistically, light and moderate drinkers of any form of alcohol live longer than those who don't drink, or who drink heavily. However any beneficial effects of moderate drinking only apply if you drink 'little and often,' as the blood-thinning effect of alcohol, which reduces the risk of harmful clots which can cause a heart attack or stroke, lasts approximately 24 hours.

Alcohol and the heart

The major benefit of moderate alcohol consumption is the reduction of coronary heart disease, the leading cause of death in the developed world. Studies consistently show** that regularly consuming moderate amounts of alcohol reduces mortality from coronary heart disease by up to 30%.

Most of the beneficial effects of moderate drinking are due to the alcohol itself, so it doesn't matter what your favourite tippie is. It is estimated that 75% of the heart-protective effects come from alcohol. Alcohol stimulates the liver to produce 'good' cholesterol (HDL-cholesterol), and 'thins the blood', reducing the risk of harmful clots which can cause a heart attack or stroke.

However, if you have uncontrolled, high blood pressure, drinking alcohol is not recommended.

For further information visit www.drinkingandyou.com/site/uk/health/heart.htm

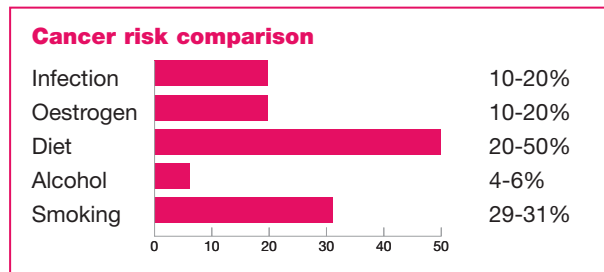
Alcohol and cancer

There is no doubt that prolonged excessive consumption of alcohol, especially when combined with smoking, leads to an increased risk of many cancers such as mouth, liver and breast cancers†.

However the American Cancer Society reported findings in 1998 that there was a reduction in cancer mortality rates of 20% among moderate drinkers who drank two or four units a day, when compared with non-drinkers. The risk of cancer increases at consumption levels above these††. Breast cancer is an exception to the above guidelines relating to moderate drinking, as no safe level of consumption has been established.

The reduction in cancer mortality rates may be due to the antioxidants in grape skins and the hops and cereals used in beer. These antioxidants, such as resveratrol and quercetin are ten times stronger than the benchmark antioxidants vitamins C and E.

For more information visit www.drinkingandyou.com/site/uk/health/cancer.htm and consult your GP.



Is alcohol fattening?

Yes, but dry wines, ciders, spirits and beers are not only fat free, they are almost sugar free too. As the table below shows, a standard half pint of lager or a 125ml glass of dry wine, contain fewer calories than a serving of apple juice. Premixed spirits, owing to the sugary carbonates or fruit juice they contain, tend to have more calories per serving.

It is important that alcohol should only be consumed in conjunction with a balanced diet and healthy lifestyle.

Five a day

Research shows*** that following the five heart healthy lifestyle factors of staying slim, not smoking, exercising gently each day, eating a balanced diet high in fibre, fruit and vegetables and low in saturated fat and drinking between half and two drinks a day halves your risk of coronary heart disease, late onset diabetes and stroke. Just 6% of us manage 'five a day' – could you do it?

Calorie content of drinks and snacks

	Calories
½ pint of 4% abv lager	95
125ml 12% av dry wine	96
½ pint 5% abv lager	123
½ pint apple juice	133
275ml bottle 5% abv 'alcopop'	179
34.5g ready salted crisps	183
100g bar of milk chocolate	525
100g salted peanuts	601

Diabetes

Diabetics can enjoy alcohol in moderation. However, the kind of drink they choose is important due to the sugar content of some alcoholic drinks. 'Dry' varieties of wine and beers are recommended while high-sugar liqueurs and fortified wines should be avoided, as should pre-mixed spirits with fruit juices or sugary carbonates. Choose a sugar-free tonic water or pure tomato juice mixer instead.

Pregnancy

The UK government guidelines suggest that alcohol consumption by pregnant women should be limited to one or two units once or twice a week. The same applies for those who are trying to conceive. As no threshold of safe drinking has been established, the best advice if pregnant, or trying to conceive, is to abstain from drinking. For further information, visit the website for the Royal Society for Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, via the link: www.rcog.org.uk to find the paper 'Alcohol and Pregnancy – information for you', published November 2006.

Can you drink when you're breast-feeding?

Alcohol clears from a mother's milk at the rate of around one unit every two hours. So try to avoid alcohol before breast-feeding, or plan ahead and express milk if you know you'll be drinking.

A spirited old age?

UK Government guidelines say that middle-aged or elderly non-drinkers or infrequent drinkers and especially those at risk of heart disease 'may wish to consider the possibility that light drinking may be of benefit to their overall health and life expectancy.'

As well as the 'heart-healthy' benefits of moderate drinking to older people, research is also finding that moderate alcohol consumption may also reduce the risk of dementia and Alzheimer's disease. At the World Alzheimer's Congress held in July 2000, it was reported that one or two alcoholic drinks a day reduces the risk of the disease significantly. Heavy alcohol consumption will, however, cause neural damage and memory loss.

Allergic reaction

In susceptible individuals, even light alcohol consumption can cause an allergic reaction such as migraine, itchiness, rashes, bowel colic, diarrhoea, asthma, swollen facial features and watery swollen eyes. If you suffer any of these symptoms, consult your GP.

Many consumers think a bad reaction to wine is mainly due to sulphur dioxide, which is an antioxidant and preservative. Unless you have a similar reaction to dried fruits, such as apricots, which are preserved with much higher levels of sulphur dioxide, this is unlikely.

Further sources of information on alcohol

www.drinkingandyou.com – for further consumer advice
 The Gateway to Sensible drinking and health via: www.aim-digest.com
 British Heart Foundation – www.bhf.org.uk
www.drinkaware.co.uk
www.knowyourlimits.gov.uk
www.infoscotland.com/alcohol
 Department of Health – www.doh.gov.uk
 Cancerbackup – www.cancerbackup.org.uk
 Cancer Research UK – www.imperialcancer.co.uk
 Macmillan Cancer – www.macmillan.org.uk
 Tacade, committed to young people's health – www.tacade.com
 Alcohol Concern – www.howsyourdrink.org.uk
 Natural Health Advisory Service – www.naturalhealthas.com
 National Childbirth Trust – www.nct.org.net

If you are concerned about your levels of drinking you can ring the free helpline, Drink Line 0800 917 8282

The author of this guide, Helena Conibear is Editorial Director of AIM – Alcohol in Moderation, an association set up in 1991 to promote the responsible consumption of alcohol. AIM maintains nine websites in five languages on sensible drinking that can be visited via the AIM website www.drinkingandyou.com. If you have any queries arising from this guide, please email info@aim-digest.com

**The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism Report on Moderate Drinking. Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research. 28(6):829-847, June 2004. Lorraine Gunzerath; Viviam Faden; Samir Zakhari; Kenneth Warren*

**Klatsky A., Drink to your Health? Scientific American 2003; 288(2):74-81*

*** Doll R., One for the heart, British Medical Journal, 1997; 315: 1664-1668*

*** Effects of Red and White Wine on Endothelial Function in subjects with Coronary Artery Disease. Whelan AP et al. Intern. Med J (2004) 34 (5): 224-228*

*** Gronbaek M., The Epidemiologic Evidence for the Cardioprotective Effects Associated with the Consumption of Alcoholic Beverages, Pathophysiology. 2004 Apr; 10(2):83-92*

****Source: Chiuve SE., McCullough ML., Sacks FM., Rimm EB. Healthy lifestyle factors in the primary prevention of coronary heart disease among men – benefits among users and nonusers of lipid-lowering and antihypertensive medications. Circulation 2006;114:160-167*

† Boffetta P, Hashibe M., Alcohol and cancer, The Lancet Oncology, Vol 7, Issue 2, February 2006, Pages 149-156

†† Boffetta P., Alcohol and cancer: benefits in addition to risks?, The Lancet Oncology Vol 6, Issue 7, July 2005, Pages 443-444

