

# How To Avoid Drink Problems



## Key questions:

- How many calories are there in alcohol?
- Is alcohol a stimulant or a depressant?
- Is moderate drinking good for you?
- How many suicide attempts involve alcohol?
- How many traffic accidents?
- How many hospital admissions?
- What would you do if you were worried about your drinking?

## Key Words:

- Moderate
- Safe Limits
- Units
- Liver
- Brain
- Sex
- Addiction
- Honesty



Who is in charge? You or the booze.

### Why do I enjoy drinking?

Alcohol damps down activity in the central nervous system, promoting relaxation, easing anxiety and reducing inhibitions. It acts as a social lubricant, and as such plays a central role in many cultures. When in the form of beer, wine or spirits, alcohol also tastes very, very nice (at least to most people).

### Are there advantages to moderate drinking?

Moderate drinkers live longer than both excessive drinkers and complete abstainers. Because it helps flush away the bad type of cholesterol that clogs arteries, alcohol may reduce the risk of heart disease by up to 20%. But moderate alcohol consumption is beneficial only to men aged over 40 — younger men can't really justify drinking on medical grounds.

### What are the risks from excessive drinking?

Short-term, a hangover.

Long-term, excessive drinking damages pretty much every organ in the body. The risks of frequently drinking above the safe levels are:

- weight-gain — a pint of beer contains nearly 200 calories (more than a packet of crisps);
- heart problems — reduced efficiency and increased risk of disease;
- nerve damage;
- depression — two-thirds of suicide attempts are alcohol related;
- impotence and infertility — even moderate drinking will reduce sexual performance (though not desire);
- cancer — of the liver, mouth, tongue and throat;
- liver disease — hepatitis and cirrhosis;
- digestive problems — ulcers, gastritis and pancreatitis.

Alcohol is frequently a factor contributing to violence (including a quarter of all murders) and accidents (including half of traffic deaths). One in four male hospital admissions is related to alcohol.

### Do I need to stop altogether or just cut down?

Only you know that. Test yourself with the following questions:

- Do you ever drink above the safe limits?
- Do you ever drink to cheer yourself up?
- Do you ever feel as if you can't get through the day without a drink?

- Do you drink every day?
- Is drinking affecting or interfering with your work, relationships or social life?
- Do you think about drinking when you're not doing it?

If you answer "Yes" to any of these you probably need to think about your drinking and be aware of its role in your life. If you answer "Yes" to two or more, try and stop drinking for three days. If you cannot do this, ask yourself honestly whether you might be dependent on drink.

### How do I cut down?

Here are six ways to cut down on your drinking:

- Write down each day how much you drink (in units) — seeing it in black and white helps
- If there is a situation in which when you always have a drink — for example, after work — try to cut it out
- When out for the evening, don't drink more than one drink an hour and set yourself a maximum number — say two or three drinks — and stick to it
- Always make your first drink a soft one
- Don't get into rounds
- Say "No" every so often
- Try these — if you can't do them, you may be becoming dependent on drink.

### Who can help if I'm concerned about my drinking?

Long-term, excessive drinking is a very bad idea. If you're concerned about your drinking you should, if you are able, talk to your partner, friends or GP.

Of course, this is far easier said than done. We like alcohol, we joke about it, we use it socially and professionally — but we don't like to acknowledge the problems it causes.

However, it is a biological fact that some people — from all walks of life — will not be able to control their relationship with alcohol. Recognising yourself as one of these people is very hard.

We have stereotyped ideas of alcoholics, but no alcoholic ever started in the gutter. If you've tried to cut down on your drinking and can't do it, you need to think about it seriously. Two million members of Alcoholics Anonymous worldwide already have.

You are no more responsible for the fact that you are powerless over alcohol than you are for the colour of your eyes. However, it is your responsibility to do something about it.