

ALCOHOL USE

Alcohol is part of the Australian culture and way of life. Australians drink alcohol to relax, socialise, celebrate, and for its taste. Nevertheless, the consumption of alcohol carries a risk of adverse health and social consequences related to its intoxicating and dependence-producing properties. In addition to the chronic diseases that may develop in those who drink large amounts of alcohol over a number of years, alcohol use is also associated with an increased risk of acute health conditions, such as injuries, including from traffic accidents.

MEN AND WOMEN

At low levels of drinking there is little difference between men and women. However, at higher levels of drinking:

- Women are at a greater risk of developing an alcohol-related disease such as cancers, diabetes and obesity
- Men are at a greater risk of an alcohol-related injury such as a car accident, assault and violence
- Women who are pregnant or trying to become pregnant should avoid alcohol all together

WHAT ABOUT THE REPORTED HEALTH BENEFITS?

Moderate alcohol intake has been proposed as having health benefits for some middle-aged or older people, but the same benefits do not extend to younger people. Those health benefits can be gained from actions other than drinking alcohol, such as exercise and a healthy diet. However, people who do not already drink alcohol are not encouraged to take up drinking just to get some health benefits. Recent scientific evidence suggests that the potential for health benefits may have been overestimated in earlier studies.



EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL

Alcohol is a central nervous system depressant, and the effects of drinking can be felt in the body in as little as 10 minutes after having a drink. However, like any drug (including alcohol), the effects vary from person to person. How alcohol affects a person depends on many things including their size, weight and health, also whether the person is used to it and whether other drugs are taken. The effects of any drug also depend on the amount taken.

LOW TO MODERATE DOSES

Some of the effects that may be experienced after drinking alcohol include:

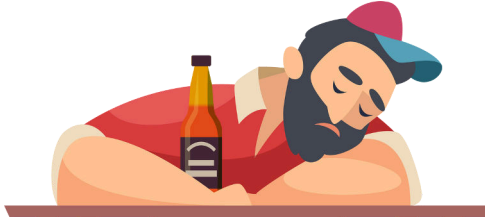
- Feeling relaxed
- Mild euphoria
- Reduced coordination and slower reflexes
- Lowered inhibitions
- Increased confidence
- Increased risky or dangerous behavior
- Blurred vision
- Slurred speech
- Flushed appearance
- Headache, nausea, vomiting
- Impaired sleep



HIGHER DOSES

When someone drinks heavily (5 or more drinks at a time) over a short period with the intention of becoming drunk, it is referred to as “binge drinking”. Binge drinking is harmful because it results in immediate and severe drunkenness. As well as the health risks, it can lead people to take unnecessary risks and put themselves and others in danger. Some common effects of binge drinking are:

- Headaches
- Tremors
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Coma
- Death



DRINKING GUIDELINES

National guidelines for alcohol consumption have been developed by the National Health and Medical Research Council to help reduce the risk of harm from alcohol consumption. They do not apply to those under the legal drinking age or to pregnant women. Those on medication or with a history of illness should consult their general practitioner for specific advice. The guidelines can help with making informed choices and help to reduce the risk of alcohol-related accidents, injuries, diseases and death, both in the short and long term. The guidelines recommend that healthy men and women should drink:

- No more than two standard drinks on any day in order to reduce the risk of harm from alcohol-related diseases or injury in the long term.
- No more than four standard drinks on any one occasion in order to reduce the risk of alcohol-related injury in the short term.

WHAT IS A STANDARD DRINK?

A standard drink contains 10 grams of pure alcohol. It is important to note that drink serving sizes are often more than one standard drink. Wine especially varies greatly in alcoholic content, usually between nine and 16 per cent, and some cocktails can contain as much as 5 or 6 standard drinks, depending on the recipe. Understanding how to count standard drinks can help you keep track of how much alcohol you consume. The amount of safe consumption will also depend on your age, size, gender, health, and how and when you consume alcohol. Both the speed of consumption and whether you're eating will also affect how alcohol is absorbed by the body.

High blood pressure can also affect the arteries to other parts of the body, such as the eyes, kidneys and legs.

In addition, the higher your blood pressure is, the harder your heart must work to pump blood around your body. If left untreated, the heart may weaken due to the extra demand placed upon it and as a result will not be able to do its job as efficiently. This may lead to a heart failure; serious condition with symptoms such as tiredness, shortness of breath and swelling of the feet and ankles.



THERE IS NO SAFE LEVEL OF ALCOHOL USE

Use of alcohol or other drugs always carries some risk - even medications can produce unwanted side effects. It is important to be careful when taking any type of drug, including alcohol. Drinking alcohol is also not recommended if you have uncontrolled high blood pressure. You should seek your doctor's advice regarding alcohol consumption if you are currently on any medication, or have a history of mental or physical illness in the family.

TIPS TO REDUCE THE RISK TO YOUR HEALTH WHEN DRINKING

Eat before you drink.

- Space your drinks with water or other non-alcohol drinks.
- Organise safe transport (book a taxi, use public transport or have a designated driver).
- Say no when you know you've had enough.
- Don't leave your drink unattended.
- Don't mix alcohol with other drugs.
- Don't drink at all before undertaking any risky activities (eg. swimming, driving or boating).
- Support your friend's decision if they choose not to drink.



“Enjoy alcohol responsibly and aim to have at least one or two alcohol free days a week.”

Where to get help:

Your GP | DrugInfo: 1300 858 584 |
DirectLine: 1800 888 236 | Family Drug Help: 1300 660 06



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