

Alcohol Harm Reduction



Background

Alcohol comes in a whole range of drinks with different alcoholic strengths, colours and tastes. Also, unusual forms of alcohol – powder, vapour and spray – have been developed by some companies.

Alcohol often has labels with useful information, such as how many units are in the drink. All labels are required by law to display the strength of the drink (alcohol by volume, or ABV).

Units of alcohol

A unit is a way of expressing the actual amount of pure alcohol that is in a drink. This allows you to compare how strong one type of alcoholic drink is to another type. For example:

- half a pint of lower-strength beer, lager or cider (ABV 3.6%), or a 25ml measure of spirits (ABV 40%) is 1 unit,
- one pint of stronger beer (ABV 5%) can be almost 3 units, and
- one large glass (250mls) of mid-strength wine (ABV 12-13%) can be over three units.



Alcohol + _____ = ?

Alcohol + Sleep = Regular drinking can affect the quality of your sleep making you feel tired and sluggish. This is because drinking disrupts your sleep cycle

But having alcohol-free days can help. You should be sleeping better and find it easier to wake up in the morning.

Alcohol + Substances = Alcohol is a depressant.

Combine it with a stimulant, such as cocaine, and the two drugs compete. The depressant drug tries to slow the brain/central nervous system down, while the stimulant tries to speed it up – putting your brain/central nervous system under great pressure.

If you're under the influence of drugs, you're less likely to make considered decisions about how much alcohol you drink. So you also put yourself at risk of alcohol poisoning and longer-term health effects of alcohol such as heart disease and cancer.

Alcohol + Mental Health = Alcohol is a depressant, which means it can disrupt that balance, affecting our thoughts, feelings and actions – and sometimes our long-term mental health.

For some, a drink can help them feel more confident and less anxious. That's because it's starting to depress the part of the brain we associate with inhibition.

It doesn't matter what mood you're in to start with, when high levels of alcohol are involved, instead of pleasurable effects increasing, it's possible that a negative emotional response will take over.

Harm Reduction Tips

- **Make a plan** and set yourself a limit for how much you'll drink and stick to it
- **Set yourself a budget.** Only take a fixed amount of money to spend on alcohol
- **Explain what you're doing to friends.** If they know you're trying to cut down they can offer support
- **Have smaller drinks** like bottled beer or a small glass of wine
- If you're a heavy drinker it can be **unsafe to suddenly stop.** Try to cut down a little bit each day
- **Have a weaker drink.** Swap strong drinks for something with a lower alcohol content
- **Drink plenty of water.** Have a pint of water before you drink and don't use alcohol to quench your thirst
- Have a couple of **alcohol-free days** each week
- **Carry condoms** with you, when you drink your inhibitions are lowered.
- **Avoid impulse drinking,** especially when you are angry as you are more likely to have a bad episode.
- **Eat before drinking,** if you have an empty stomach alcohol will get into your bloodstream quicker.

Why Reduce your alcohol intake?

Here are some positive outcomes you may notice if you reduce:



- feel less tired and more energetic
- feel happier and experience better moods
- have a healthier heart and prevent long-term health problems
- look and feel fitter
- have better memory and judgment
- strengthen your immune system and be less prone to illness



SHORT TERM & LONG TERM BENEFITS FROM REDUCING INTAKE

SHORT TERM

Sleep better, You should be sleeping better and find it easier to wake up in the morning.

Look better, Alcohol is a diuretic meaning it can make you urinate more causing you to be dehydrated. This can cause your skin and eyes to look dull and lifeless.

Save money, reducing the amount of alcohol intake will see a reduce in your spending on alcohol and give you a chance to spend it on other things you enjoy.

Violence and antisocial behaviour- each year in England and Wales more than 1.2 million violent incidents are linked to alcohol misuse.

LONG TERM

Alcohol and cancer, alcohol is linked to 7 different types of cancer including breast and mouth cancer.

Fatty Liver, giving up drinking will have a big impact on your liver and should reduce the chances of developing liver disease. Regularly drinking more than the UK Chief Medical Officers' Low Risk Drinking Guidelines of 14 units a week for both men and women can lead to fatty liver.

Other health problems such as high blood pressure, stroke, dementia and sexual problems

Social problems such as unemployment, divorce/relationship issues and a bigger chance of injuries at work or involved in car accidents.