

# Alcohol: brief advice and information

Information for patients from the Alcohol and Substance Misuse Team

Individuals who are alcohol dependent are not always able to stop drinking after just one drink. Their bodies physically depend on the “substance” and when they are not drinking, individuals can experience withdrawal symptoms such as nausea, tremors, or anxiety. They need alcohol to feel good, to relax, or to relieve tension<sup>(1)</sup>

Here at East Kent Hospitals, we are screening most adult patients for their use of alcohol and substances. This does not mean you have a problem, although some information and advice can help make a difference, preventing future problems.

If you have a concern about your use of alcohol or drugs, our specialist team of nurses are here to help. All referrals being made are in complete confidence.

Please let the medical staff who are treating you know so an appointment can be made.



## Alcohol guidelines (2016) advise that:

- **Lower risk drinking for men and women**
  - Drink no more than 14 units per week.
  - Include at least three alcohol free days each week.
  - Avoid drinking more than two to three units on days that you do drink.
  - Drink sensibly on days you do drink.
- If you do drink as much as 14 units per week, then it is recommended that your alcohol consumption is spread over at least three days or more.
- Studies have shown that health risks increase when an individual regularly drinks more than 14 units of alcohol per week and could lead to:
  - Mouth, throat, oesophageal and bowel/bladder, stomach cancers
  - Liver disease leading to decompensation of the liver
  - Poor sleep (insomnia)
  - Vitamin B1 deficiency leading to memory loss
  - Men: impotence (not able to get or keep an erection)
  - Heart disease
  - Hypertension (raised or high blood pressure)
  - Stroke
  - Anxiety and depression
  - Aggression
  - Relationship problems
  - Alcohol related brain disease
  - Alcohol dependency
  - Risk behaviour
  - Pancreatitis (inflamed (swollen) pancreas)
  - Varices (enlarged or swollen veins)
  - Death<sup>(2)</sup>.

## Calculate your weekly intake of units

- A bottle of 12% wine (70cl) = 9 units (630 calories)
- A large 250ml 13% glass of wine = 3 units (210 calories)
- A double vodka 37.5% 50ml = 1.8 units (104 calories)
- A bottle of spirits 37.5% (75cl) = 28 to 32 units (1650 calories)
- A 440ml can of 5% beer/cider/lager = 2.2 units (187 calories)
- A 440ml can of 7.5% lager/cider = 4 units (230 calories)
- A pint of 4% beer/cider/lager = 2.3 units (180 calories)

(Approximate number of units and calories in each drink)

## If you are above the guidelines, why not start cutting back straight away?

- Keep a track of your units, stay in the lower risk guidelines (14 units per week).
- Reduce the strength of the alcohol you drink, go for lower alcohol content (ABV).
- Avoid drinking alcohol before going out, this is known as preloading.
- Remember to have something to eat before going out, such as pasta, pizza, or burgers. These types of foods **may** help by slowing down the absorption of alcohol in your stomach.
- Before you start drinking set a limit on how much and stick to it.
- Try a smaller glass or add a mixer, make it into a long drink and take longer to drink it.
- Drink at your own pace; do not feel pressured to keep up with others.
- If someone is getting a round do not feel like you must have a drink.
- Remember it's ok to say no! <sup>(2)</sup>

## Is it safe to drink alcohol when pregnant?

Chief Medical Officers for the UK recommend that if you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant, the safest approach is not to drink alcohol at all to keep risks to your baby to a minimum.

- When you drink whilst pregnant especially in the first three months, alcohol passes from your blood through to the placenta and then into your baby.
- A baby's liver is one of the last organs to develop and does not begin to mature until the later stages of pregnancy.
- Miscarriage, premature birth, and low birth weight has been especially linked to drinking alcohol during the first three months of pregnancy.
- Drinking heavily throughout pregnancy can cause a serious condition called foetal alcohol syndrome (FAS), that can affect your baby's development. These symptoms include:
  - distinct facial features
  - poor growth; and
  - behavioural and learning problems<sup>(3)</sup>.

## What is alcohol withdrawal syndrome?

Alcohol withdrawal syndrome can happen if you suddenly reduce or stop drinking. This can be a life threatening condition, which presents as anxiety and shakiness, leading onto severe complications, such as seizures and delirium tremens (also known as DTs). Ask for medical advice if you think you are experiencing alcohol withdrawals<sup>(4)</sup>.

## References

### 1. American Addiction Centers

Web: [www.alcohol.org/faq/what-are-the-signs](http://www.alcohol.org/faq/what-are-the-signs)

### 2. NHS: Alcohol misuse

Web: [www.nhs.uk/conditions/alcohol-misuse/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/alcohol-misuse/)

### 3. NHS: Drinking alcohol while pregnant

Web: [www.nhs.uk/pregnancy/keeping-well/drinking-alcohol-while-pregnant/](http://www.nhs.uk/pregnancy/keeping-well/drinking-alcohol-while-pregnant/)

### 4. Healthline: Alcohol Withdrawal Syndrome

Web: [www.healthline.com/health/alcoholism/withdrawal](http://www.healthline.com/health/alcoholism/withdrawal)

## Useful contact numbers

- **Alcoholics Anonymous**

National Helpline: 0800 91 77 65 0

- **Drug and Alcohol Service: Forward Trust**

Telephone: 0300 12 31 18 6 (open 7 days a week; 24 hours a day)

- **Narcotics Anonymous** (alcohol as well as illicit drug use)

Telephone: 0207 25 14 007

National helpline: 0300 99 12 12

- **Release the Pressure**

Text: Kent to 85 25 8

Telephone: 0800 10 70 16 0 (24 hour helpline)

- **The Safe Haven Thanet** (mental health support for people over 16 years old)

Telephone: 07850 65 58 77 or 07483 91 82 33 (6pm to 11pm)

Telephone: 0800 10 70 16 0 (24 hour helpline)

- **Samaritans**

Telephone: 11 61 23

- **We Are With You** (for the over 50s)

Telephone: 0800 80 10 75 0

- **We Are With You** (for the under 17s, also signposting for the under 21s)

Telephone: 01795 50 08 81

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**Any complaints, comments, concerns, or compliments** please speak to your doctor or nurse, or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01227 78 31 45, or email [ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net)

**Patients should not bring in large sums of money or valuables into hospital.** Please note that East Kent Hospitals accepts no responsibility for the loss or damage to personal property, unless the property had been handed in to Trust staff for safe-keeping.

**Further patient leaflets** are available via the East Kent Hospitals web site [www.ekhufft.nhs.uk/patientinformation](http://www.ekhufft.nhs.uk/patientinformation)