

# FAQs: Alcohol

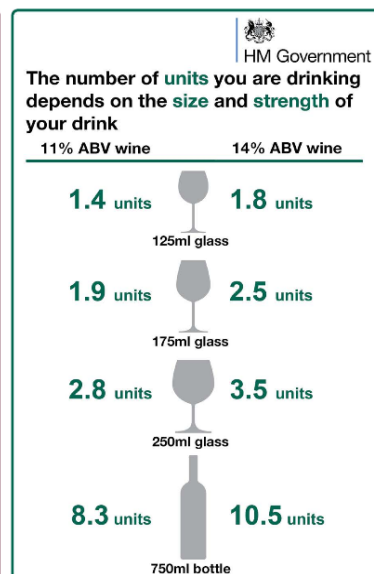
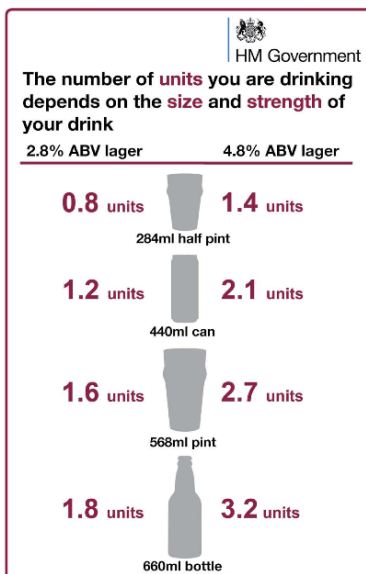
## What are the limits on alcohol intake?

The government guidelines for alcohol consumption recommend **no more than 14 units of alcohol per week for both men and women**. A unit is about half a pint of beer, lager or cider, or a single measure of spirits.

But it's important to remember that these are averages; a unit is dependent on the strength of alcohol which is measured as alcohol by volume (ABV). So, for the same size glass or bottle, the higher the ABV of your alcoholic drink, the higher the number of units.



## Can I save my 14 units up and drink them all at once?



If you do drink as much as 14 units per week, don't 'save up' the units, but spread them evenly over 3 or more days and have several alcohol-free days a week. People who have 1 or 2 heavy drinking sessions each week increase the risk of death from long-term illnesses, accidents and injuries. Binge drinking (defined by the Office of National Statistics as more than 8 units for men and 6 units for women in one sitting) should also be avoided.

To keep the short-term health risks low, limit the total amount of alcohol drunk on any one occasion, drink more slowly, with food and alternate with water.

## Why should I not exceed the recommendations?

Regularly drinking more than 14 units a week risks damaging your health and can contribute to increased risk of:

- Cancers of the mouth and throat
- Heart disease and stroke
- Liver disease
- Damage to the brain and nervous system

Alcohol is also associated with mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety. The Royal College of Psychiatrists reported two ways in which depression and alcohol may be connected.

- You regularly drink too much including (including 'binge drinking') which makes you feel depressed OR
- You drink to relieve anxiety or depression.

In addition, alcohol contributes calories to the diet.

## Can alcohol have an effect on my weight management?

Many people are not aware of the calories in alcoholic drinks. Alcohol contains 7 kcal per gram, almost as many as fat! As well as these calories, alcohol can stimulate your appetite, which may lead to you eating more food after drinking and could lead to weight gain. Alcohol may also weaken the resolve not to over-indulge, so any good intentions you might have about eating sensibly may be lost once you've had a few glasses.

<i>Drink (average ABV)</i>	<i>Measure</i>	<i>Calories (kcal)</i>	<i>Units</i>
Lager (5%)	1 pint (568 ml)	244	2.8
Lager (5%)	1 small bottle (330 ml)	142	1.6
Ale/stout (4%)	1 pint (568 ml)	210	2.3
Cider (4.5%)	1 pint (568 ml)	216	2.6
Champagne/Prosecco (12%)	1 glass (125 ml)	89	1.5
Wine (13%)	Regular glass (175 ml)	159	2.3
	Large glass (250 ml)	228	3.2
Port/Sherry (18%)	Standard (50 ml)	65	0.9
Irish Cream Liqueur	Standard (50 ml)	175	0.9
Dark spirit (e.g. whisky, rum)	Standard (25 ml)	61	1
Light spirit (e.g. vodka, gin)	Standard (25 ml)	52	0.9
Double gin and tonic	Large (50 ml)	160	1.9
Double gin and low-calorie tonic	Large (50 ml)	106	1.9
Double vodka and energy drink	Large (50 ml)	170	1.9

## How can I cut down on my alcohol intake?

To help you reduce the amount of alcohol you drink, try the tips below.

### When drinking at home...

- **Avoid overfilling your glass** - if you fill glasses to the rim, you'll drink more than you realise.
- **Stick to single measures** – why not buy a measure instead of free pouring?
- **Keep track of top ups** - don't top up your glass before you have finished a drink so you can keep an eye on exactly how much you are drinking. It's hard to keep track if your half-filled glass is being topped up.
- **Serve some soft drinks** - try replacing the alcohol in your fridge with low-calorie soft drinks. The soft option doesn't have to be dull; you can even mix up some mocktails (non-alcoholic cocktails) or try alcohol-free 'spirits'.



## When drinking out...



- **Eat before you drink** - try not to drink on an empty stomach as the presence of food in the stomach will help delay the absorption of alcohol into the blood and stop you getting drunk so quickly.
- **Remove yourself from rounds** – this could encourage you to drink faster than you'd like.
- **Alternate** – drink low-calorie soft drinks or water between alcoholic drinks to limit alcohol intake and to help prevent dehydration.
- **Dilute your drink** - try white wine and soda (spritzer) or a shandy (half lager, half diet lemonade). You'll still get a large drink, but one that contains less alcohol and calories.
- **Caution with cocktails** - they can contain more alcohol than you might think.
- **Size matters** - swap pints for half pints or bottled beers, and opt for smaller glasses of wine.
- **Remember your ABVs** - drinks with higher ABVs have more alcohol and count as more units. Switching to these will mean you can make your evening's units go further and you may not even notice the difference.
- **Order some ice** – if you're drinking bottled cider, asking for some ice will slow down how fast you drink as you will pour less into the glass.

## How can I help hold back the hangover?

The search for alcohol hangover cures is as old as alcohol itself. Many cures have been suggested but scientific evidence for their effectiveness is generally lacking. The best way of course to avoid a hangover is not to drink. If you decide to drink, do it sensibly and within the recommended limits.

- Dehydration is one of the main causes of hangover symptoms like the headache. This is because alcohol acts as a diuretic which means that you may urinate more and become dehydrated.
- Drink plenty of fluids to get yourself rehydrated. As well as water why not try some unsweetened fruit juice (dilute with sparkling water if you like) to give yourself a little vitamin boost, or a smoothie made with milk, fruit and ice.
- Although you may have heard a hair of the dog may help (drinking more alcohol) it is likely only to delay the problem, so avoid alcohol and get plenty of sleep.



## Is alcohol safe to drink during pregnancy?

Drinking in pregnancy can lead to long-term harm to your baby, as high intakes of alcohol may affect your baby's development, particularly in the early stages of pregnancy.

Recent reviews have shown that the risks of low birth weight, preterm birth and being small for gestational age all may be slightly increased in mothers drinking above 1-2 units/day during pregnancy.

If you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, the safest approach is not to drink alcohol at all, to keep risks to your baby to a minimum.

As there may be a gap between when you conceive and when you find out that you are pregnant, it is best and safest to simply avoid drinking alcohol during this time. However, the risk of harm to the baby is likely to be low if a woman has drunk only small amounts of alcohol before she knew she was pregnant or during pregnancy. For women who find out they are pregnant after already having drunk during early pregnancy, the safest approach may be to stop drinking, but they should be aware that it is unlikely in most cases that their baby has been affected.

### Where can I find more information?

For more information on alcohol, visit [www.drinkaware.co.uk](http://www.drinkaware.co.uk)

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