



You and Alcohol

Making Smart Choices

Overuse of alcohol causes serious problems with health, fitness, readiness, social relationships, family life, and work performance.

If you are drinking too much, you can improve your life and health by cutting down.



The material in this pamphlet is based on information from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) of the National Institutes of Health (NIH)

Counting and Measuring Drinks

In the United States, a standard drink contains about 14 grams of pure alcohol (about 0.6 fluid ounces or 1.2 tablespoons). Listed below are U.S. standard drink equivalents. These are approximate since different brands and types of beverages vary in their actual alcohol content.



Moderate Drinking Limits

For healthy men up to age 65

- No more than 4 drinks in a day AND no more than 14 drinks in a week.

For healthy women up to age 65 and healthy men over 65

- No more than 3 drinks in a day AND no more than 7 drinks in a week.
- Women who are pregnant should not use alcohol at all due to its possible effects on the developing fetus.

Depending on your health status, your doctor may advise you to drink less than these guidelines or to abstain.

Personal Reasons for Cutting Down or Stopping

There are many reasons why you may want to cut down or stop drinking. You may want to improve your health, sleep more soundly, or get along better with your family or friends. Make a list of the reasons you want to drink less.

For beer, the approximate number of standard drinks in

- 12 oz. = 1
- 16 oz. = 1.3
- 22 oz. = 2
- 40 oz. = 3.3

For malt liquor, the approximate number of standard drinks in

- 12 oz. = 1.5
- 16 oz. = 2
- 22 oz. = 2.5
- 40 oz. = 4.5

For table wine, the approximate number of standard drinks in

- A standard 750-mL (25-oz.) bottle = 5

For 80-proof spirits, or “hard liquor,” the approximate number of standard drinks in

- A mixed drink = 1 or more*
- A pint (16 oz.) = 11
- A fifth (25 oz.) = 17
- 1.75 L (59 oz.) = 39

*Note: Due type of spirits and the recipe, a mixed drink can equal from one to three or more standard drinks.

Setting Drinking Goals

Decide on how many days a week you want to drink and how many drinks you'll have on those days. It's a good idea to have some days when you don't drink. Write your drinking goal and put it where you can see it, such as on your refrigerator or bathroom mirror. Your goal might read like this:

My Drinking Goal

I will start on this day _____.

I will not drink more than _____ drinks in 1 day.

I will not drink more than _____ drinks in 1 week.

or I will stop drinking alcohol.

Keeping Track of Your Drinking

Keep track of how much you drink by finding a way that works for you, such as:

- Placing a card in your wallet
- Checking marks on a calendar
- Using a personal digital assistant

If you make note of each drink before you have it, this will help you slow down when needed.

Pacing and Spacing

When you do drink, pace yourself.

- Sip slowly.
- Have no more than one drink with alcohol per hour.
- Alternate “drink spacers” — non-alcoholic drinks such as water, soda, or juice — with drinks containing alcohol.
- Don't drink on an empty stomach; have some food so the alcohol will be absorbed more slowly into your system.

What would you like to do instead of drinking? Use the time and money spent on drinking to do something fun with your family or friends. Go out to eat, see a movie, or play sports or a game.

Avoiding “Triggers”

What triggers your urge to drink?

- If certain people or places make you drink even when you don't want to or to drink more than you should, try to avoid them.
- If certain activities, times of day, or feelings trigger the urge, plan what you'll do instead of drinking.
- If drinking at home is a problem, keep little or no alcohol there.
- If you drink mainly when you are feeling uptight, you could talk with a behavioral health specialist who could train you in tension-reducing strategies.

Planning to Handle Urges to Drink

When an urge hits, try to do one or more of the following:

- Remind yourself of your reasons for changing
- Talk it through with someone you trust
- Get involved with a healthy, distracting activity
- “Urge surf” - instead of fighting the feeling, accept it and ride it out, knowing that it will soon crest like a wave and pass
- Do not drink when you are angry, upset, or having a bad day

These are habits you need to break if you want to drink less.

Social Pressures to Drink

You're likely to be offered a drink at times when you don't care for one. Have a polite, convincing “no, thanks” ready. The faster you can say “No” to these offers, the less likely you are to give in. If you hesitate, it allows time to think of excuses to go along.

About one third of the adults in the US have less than one drink a month. So, it is not that unusual to refuse when people ask you if you would like a drink.

DO NOT GIVE UP!

Most people do not cut down or give up drinking all at once. Just like a diet, change in behavior is not easy. If you do not reach your goal the first time, try again. Remember to get support from people who care about you and want to help. Do not give up!

How Do You Know If You Are Dependent on Alcohol?

Various tests and interview questions can be used by a health care provider to help determine if you may be physically or psychologically dependent on alcohol.

Dependence on alcohol involves things like:

- Drinking more to get the same effect that you may have gotten earlier with a smaller amount of alcohol
- Feeling physically very uncomfortable if you stop drinking all at once
- Having difficulties controlling the amount that you drink
- Having alcohol use become a major focus of your life style and activities

Alcohol dependence is serious but is very treatable. Treatment is most likely to be successful when alcohol dependence is recognized and treated early.

Additional Tips for Quitting

If you want to quit drinking altogether, the last three strategies above can help. In addition, you may wish to ask for support from people who might be willing to help, such as a spouse or non-drinking friends.

Joining Alcoholics Anonymous or another mutual support group is a way to acquire a network of friends who have found ways to live without alcohol.

If you're dependent on alcohol or are drinking very heavily and decide to stop drinking completely, don't go it alone. Sudden withdrawal from heavy drinking can cause dangerous side effects such as seizures. See a doctor to plan a safe recovery.

More Help

If you are having problems cutting down on drinking or you feel that you may be dependent on alcohol, you should make an appointment with your primary care manager.

If you need counseling or help locating services, please call Military One Source 24/7 at 1-800-342-9647.