



Alcohol



Health



Wellness



Nutrition



Support

Introduction

Before we explore the topic of alcohol, it's worth a reminder of why water is so important.

Water is vital for the body to function day-to-day. Around 60 per cent of an adult body is made of water; it makes up your blood, it keeps your heart pumping, and your brain working - so it's important we drink water regularly.

Alcoholic drinks DO NOT count towards your daily fluid intake as they can make you urinate more than usual, leaving you dehydrated.

For more detailed information, see our 'Water & hydration' booklet.

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Why do we need to talk about alcohol?

Our bodies have no need for alcohol. It provides no nutritional benefits and drinking alcohol in any quantity can only lead to harm.

Alcohol is an addictive substance that can lead to more than 60 different health conditions - including obesity, type 2 diabetes, liver disease, heart disease and some cancers.

Alcohol contains ethanol, an addictive substance which can lead us to become dependent. This can cause further harm to our mental wellbeing and can affect our entire lives, including work and family.

Despite these facts, 24% of UK adults regularly drink more than the recommended guidelines. Meanwhile, 82% of adults who are dependent and managing addiction to alcohol are not receiving any treatment. Alcohol misuse is the biggest risk factor for ill health in people aged 19-49.

By understanding alcohol, the effect it has on our bodies and the support available, we can support ourselves and our friends and family to reduce our alcohol intake or quit altogether.

What is a unit of alcohol?

We are often told about units of alcohol and how many we should have. We measure in 'units' because each alcoholic drink is different based on the type and what percentage ABV it is. Units are therefore useful for providing a consistent measurement for all drinks.

One unit equals 10ml or 8g of pure alcohol. This is the amount of alcohol the average adult liver can break down in an hour, although this will vary from person to person.

If a label says '12% ABV' it means 12% of the volume of that drink is pure alcohol. The higher the number means more alcohol in total and a stronger drink.

For example:

- A 4% ABV lager has four units in one litre. So if you drink half a litre (500ml), which is around one pint, you'll have had two units.
- Wine at 12% ABV has 12 units in one litre. So if you drink a quarter of a litre (250ml), which is the same size as a large glass in a restaurant, then you'll have had three units.
- A 40% ABV spirit has 40 units in one litre. So if you drink a double measure (50ml), you'll have had two units.

Measuring and counting units can get quite technical and it's not something we're likely to do while socialising or eating a meal.

However, we should aim to drink no more than 14 units per week - the equivalent of six pints of beer, six glasses of wine, or six double measures of spirits.



Is there a safe amount of alcohol?

No alcohol at all is best for our health. But if we do choose to drink alcohol then we shouldn't drink more than **14 units per week**. We should also aim to spread the units evenly across three days or more, and have at least two days back-to-back with no alcohol at all.

Remember, too, that these are averages. What constitutes a unit is dependent on the strength of the alcohol you are drinking (percentage ABV). For the same size glass or bottle, the higher the ABV of your alcoholic drink, the higher the number of units.

You can use the Alcohol Change UK unit calculator to assess your drinking habits and see how many units you drink. Visit <https://alcoholchange.org.uk/alcohol-facts/interactive-tools/unit-calculator>

How does alcohol affect weight loss?

It's high in calories – and we drink it fast!

Alcohol is high in calories and can cause weight gain. One gram of alcohol provides seven calories of energy. This is more than carbohydrate and protein and just less than fat.

Unlike other food and drink, the energy from alcohol has no specific purpose in our diets and enters our blood stream as glucose to be used for energy. Usually, when we are drinking alcohol, we are not physically active - meaning the high volume of calories and energy we are taking in has no purpose at that time and is likely to be stored as fat.

It adds calories to your mealtimes

We often pair alcohol with a meal or snacks, so we're then taking in the energy from the alcohol as well as what we've eaten. Even two small bottles of beer will add around 300 calories to your energy intake. That's around 15% of a woman's recommended daily calories.

It can trigger hunger and cravings

For many, drinking alcohol can leave you feeling hungry. Alcohol also weakens our ability to say no to food and other treats, so any good intentions you might have about eating sensibly may be lost once you've had a few alcoholic drinks.

The hangover... we feel tired as we recover and this affects our choices

The effects of alcohol will also impact our meal choices the next day. After alcohol, our bodies crave high fat, high calorie foods, leading to us choosing high energy foods with lower nutritional value the day after.



We are also less likely to be physically active the next day. These two factors combined can lead to weight gain, with a higher calorie intake alongside a reduction in the number of calories our bodies use.

As with any energy consumption, if we overindulge and binge drink regularly, the extra calories we take in will be stored as fat, especially if we are not active. This will lead to increased fat storage over time, alongside the other harmful side-effects of regular heavy consumption of alcohol.

Further support

Alcohol can be a part of a balanced diet in moderation. Take a quick online test for your drinking habits at <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/tools/drinking-check/#/overview>. Measure the number of calories and units in the alcohol you drink by visiting <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/tools/unit-and-calorie-calculator/#/unit-and-calorie-calculator>.

The logo for 'drinkaware' features the word 'drinkaware' in a bold, dark blue, sans-serif font. A small red dot is positioned above the letter 'i'.

Alcohol support is not just for people who have become dependent on alcohol. If you feel you need support to reduce your alcohol own Intake, With You support adults, young people and families to reduce alcohol and other substances. You can find out more and chat to an advisor online by visiting <https://www.wearewithyou.org.uk/find-support/talk-to-a-trained-recovery-worker>. You can also visit the service in person. Find out how at <https://www.wearewithyou.org.uk/find-support/search-for-local-support>

The logo for 'withyou' consists of the word 'withyou' in a blue, lowercase, sans-serif font.

Alcohol can be a coping mechanism for people facing issues with their mental health. If you need somebody to talk to, Samaritans are available 24 hours a day, every day of the year. You can speak to them for free by calling 116 123.

The logo for 'SAMARITANS' features the word 'SAMARITANS' in white, uppercase, sans-serif font, centered within a solid green rectangular background.

If you would like to learn more or require more information, please get in touch.

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