

# Managing alcohol dependency

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**Having a drink can be a great way to relax, but in some cases too much can lead to problems. If you work in the licensed trade, the chances are you have seen this at some point. You may have seen customers drink more than is good for them and you might also find yourself facing problems connected to having too much to drink.**

Don't be worried that you're alone in this. Alcohol is an addictive drug and it's possible to become both psychologically and physically dependent on it. Research shows that more publicans and bar staff suffer from cirrhosis and other alcohol-related health problems than people in other jobs.

## If you think you are drinking too much

If you drink regularly, your body gets used to lots of alcohol and you may find that you need to drink increasingly more to feel its effects. If you don't feel right without a drink, or if you need a drink to start the day, then you could be becoming addicted. If the amount you drink can put you or someone else in any kind of danger, you should stop and think.

## How much is too much?

You count as a heavy drinker if you go above the recommended "safe" limits

- Men should drink no more than 14 units of alcohol per week, no more than four units in any one day, and have at least two alcohol-free days a week.
- Women should drink no more than 14 units of alcohol per week, no more than three units in any one day, and have at least two alcohol-free days a week.
- Pregnant women. Advice from the Department of Health states that ... "pregnant women or women trying to conceive should not drink alcohol at all. If they do choose to drink, to minimise the risk to the baby, they should not drink more than 1-2 units of alcohol once or twice a week and should not get drunk".

## But what is a "unit"?

- One unit of alcohol is about equal to:
  - half a pint of ordinary strength beer, lager or cider (3-4% alcohol by volume); or
  - a small pub measure (25 ml) of spirits (40% alcohol by volume); or
  - a standard pub measure (50 ml) of fortified wine such as sherry or port (20% alcohol by volume).

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- There are one and a half units of alcohol in:
  - a small glass (125 ml) of ordinary strength wine (12% alcohol by volume); or
  - a standard pub measure (35 ml) of spirits (40% alcohol by volume).

But remember, many wines and beers are stronger than the more traditional ordinary strengths.

There is no guaranteed safe level of drinking, but if you drink below the recommended daily limits, the risks of harming your health are low. They do not apply to women who are pregnant (or trying to conceive) or young people.

## What happens when you drink too much

Drinking too much can lead to lack of co-ordination, blurred vision, slurred speech and loss of balance. This could cause accidents at home, at work, or on the roads, sometimes with serious results. Drinking too much in one go could lead to unconsciousness, coma and even death. Alcohol can also make you do things you wouldn't normally do and this could lead to family upsets or even problems at work.

If you drink too much over a long period of time, it can cause major health problems like liver disease, high blood pressure and other heart problems, memory loss and sexual problems. It can also increase your risk of getting some kinds of cancer.

Other long-term side effects can include problems with sleeping, mood swings and violence.

If you're a woman and you drink too much while you're pregnant, you could harm your unborn baby.

## Facing up to the problem

Acknowledging that drinking too much is having a negative impact on your life is the most important first step.

How much do you actually drink?

It's a good idea to keep a record of what you drink, over a couple of weeks.

Be honest with yourself. Make a note of all the drinks you have, and don't underestimate quantities and alcohol strengths.

## Try cutting back

This is easier said than done but how about trying low alcohol beers or trying to avoid the really strong beers and lagers

Pacing the rate at which you drink could help as well. Perhaps alternate soft drinks or water with alcoholic drinks

And eating when you're having a drink may also help you to drink less.

## Reasons for cutting down

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Make sure you know exactly why you want to cut down. If you don't want to cut down on your drinking then you will find it hard or impossible to do so. Write down all the reasons you can think of for wanting to change how much you drink.

## Give yourself realistic targets.

Set a goal you can stick to. To start with, give yourself a fairly easy target to aim at. Decide what's going to be the **maximum** number of drinks you know you can handle in any week, or any shift at work, or on any particular social occasion. If that works, then see if you can cut it back further.

**Take it one step at a time.**

## Do something to help yourself

Decide when your new regime will start – and try to stick to it. Keep a tally of what you drink, and compare it with your target amount. Don't cheat! Find ways of refusing a drink. Confide in your partner, or colleagues, if you can.

**Important:** If you get withdrawal symptoms (such as 'the shakes') when you stop drinking, this means you could be addicted to alcohol. Coming off alcohol too quickly could be very dangerous. You should see a doctor or go to an advice and counselling centre before trying to stop.

## Getting help

**You may find you can control the amount you drink and stop it from becoming a real problem. But, like a large number of other people, you may find that you really need further help.**

If you think you're drinking too much and need help, it might be useful to talk to your GP or a counsellor.

Your GP will ask about your drinking, how you feel about it and its effect on your life and wellbeing. He or she may ask you the following four questions to establish if you are alcohol dependent. These are known as the CAGE questions.

- Have you ever felt you should cut down on your drinking?
- Have people annoyed you by criticising your drinking?
- Have you ever felt bad or guilty about your drinking?
- Have you ever had a drink first thing in the morning to steady your nerves or to get rid of a hangover (eye opener)?

## Treatment of alcohol dependence

Your treatment will be tailored to suit you and will depend on how much you drink, and any associated physical or mental health problems that you may have.

Your GP will assess your level of alcohol dependence. If you have severe alcohol dependence, especially if there is evidence of physical damage to your internal organs such as your liver, then your doctor is likely to advise you to cut down on alcohol with the aim of stopping drinking completely.

However, it's recognised that some people have a lower level of alcohol dependence and may not be willing to give up alcohol completely. It's

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important to work with your doctor to agree on a treatment plan that is realistic for you, and one which you can stick to; in this case it may be that you aim to cut down your drinking to a controlled, lower level.

Whether you choose to go to rehab, rely on self-help programs, get therapy, or take a self-directed treatment approach, support is essential. Recovering from alcohol addiction is much easier when you have people you can lean on for encouragement, comfort, and guidance. Without support, it's easy to fall back into old patterns when things get tough. There are many professional services and groups that can give you the help and support you need to stop drinking. All the advice given is confidential.

## Useful links

If you are experiencing any of the issues covered in this factsheet, in the first instance call our free helpline on **0808 801 0550**.

Our Advisors will listen without judging and will work with you as best they can to achieve a positive outcome. If you prefer you can email: [helpline@ltcharity.org.uk](mailto:helpline@ltcharity.org.uk) Visit our website: [www.licensedtradecharity.org.uk](http://www.licensedtradecharity.org.uk) It's full of useful information about the kind of issues we know people who work in the licensed trade face.

**Drinkaware**  
[www.drinkaware.co.uk](http://www.drinkaware.co.uk)  
Tel: 020 7766 9900

**drinkaware.co.uk**  
for the facts

**National Alcohol Helpline**  
'Drinkline': 0300 123 1110

## Mon-Fri 9am-8pm; Weekends 11am-4pm

This is a telephone network, staffed by trained counsellors. When you call 'Drinkline', they can give you facts about safe drinking levels, and advice and help on ways to cut down on drinking, or to give it up altogether. They can also help with practical advice about some of the wider problems caused by drink.

## Alcohol Concern

**0203 907 8480 - Monday to Friday  
9.00 am to 5.00 pm**

[www.alcoholconcern.org.uk](http://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk) This is the national agency on alcohol misuse.



They run a free and confidential on-line course. They say: "We think that drinking a reasonable amount is good for most people. What we want to do is give you sufficient information for you to decide what is a reasonable amount for you to drink, and then help you get there! The online course is in six weekly parts. It takes less than an hour a week, for 6 weeks -online to complete the course, during which time we will teach you how to become a "Thinker Drinker" and develop safer drinking habits." **27 Swinton Street, London WC1X 9NW**

## Alcoholics Anonymous

**National Helpline 0800 9177 650**

[www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk](http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk)  
[help@aamail.org](mailto:help@aamail.org)



Alcoholics Anonymous works on a group basis. Members, who remain anonymous, share their experience, strength and hope with each other to help solve their common problem. If you want to join a group, then you have to commit yourself to try and give up drink. You don't have to pay anything.

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PO Box 1, Stonebow House, Stonebow, York  
YO1 2NJ

## Al-Anon Family Groups UK and Eire

Helpline: 020 7403 0888

10am-10pm 365 days a year

[www.al-anonuk.org.uk](http://www.al-anonuk.org.uk)



Al-Anon offers understanding and support for families and friends of problem drinkers, whether the alcoholic is still drinking or not. **Alateen**, a part of Al-Anon, is for young people aged 12-20 who have been affected by someone else's drinking, usually that of a parent.

**57B Great Suffolk Street, London SE1 0BB**

## BBPA

Tel: 020 7627 9191

[www.beerandpub.com](http://www.beerandpub.com) The

BBPA promotes and represents the beer and pub sector of the licensed drinks industry. It aims to promote sensible and responsible drinking.

**Market Towers, No 1 Nine Elms Lane, London, SW8 5NQ**



## NHS – Social Drinking

[www.nhs.uk/Livewell/alcohol/Pages/Socialdrinking.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/alcohol/Pages/Socialdrinking.aspx)

