

The facts about binge drinking.

Alcohol is the most common type of drug use in Australia. Alcohol is so widely used that many people don't think of it as a drug and may not realise that it can be harmful. As a result, they may drink too heavily at times.

The term 'binge drinking' generally refers to drinking heavily over a short period of time with the intention of getting drunk, resulting in immediate and severe intoxication.

Binge drinking can be harmful in several ways:

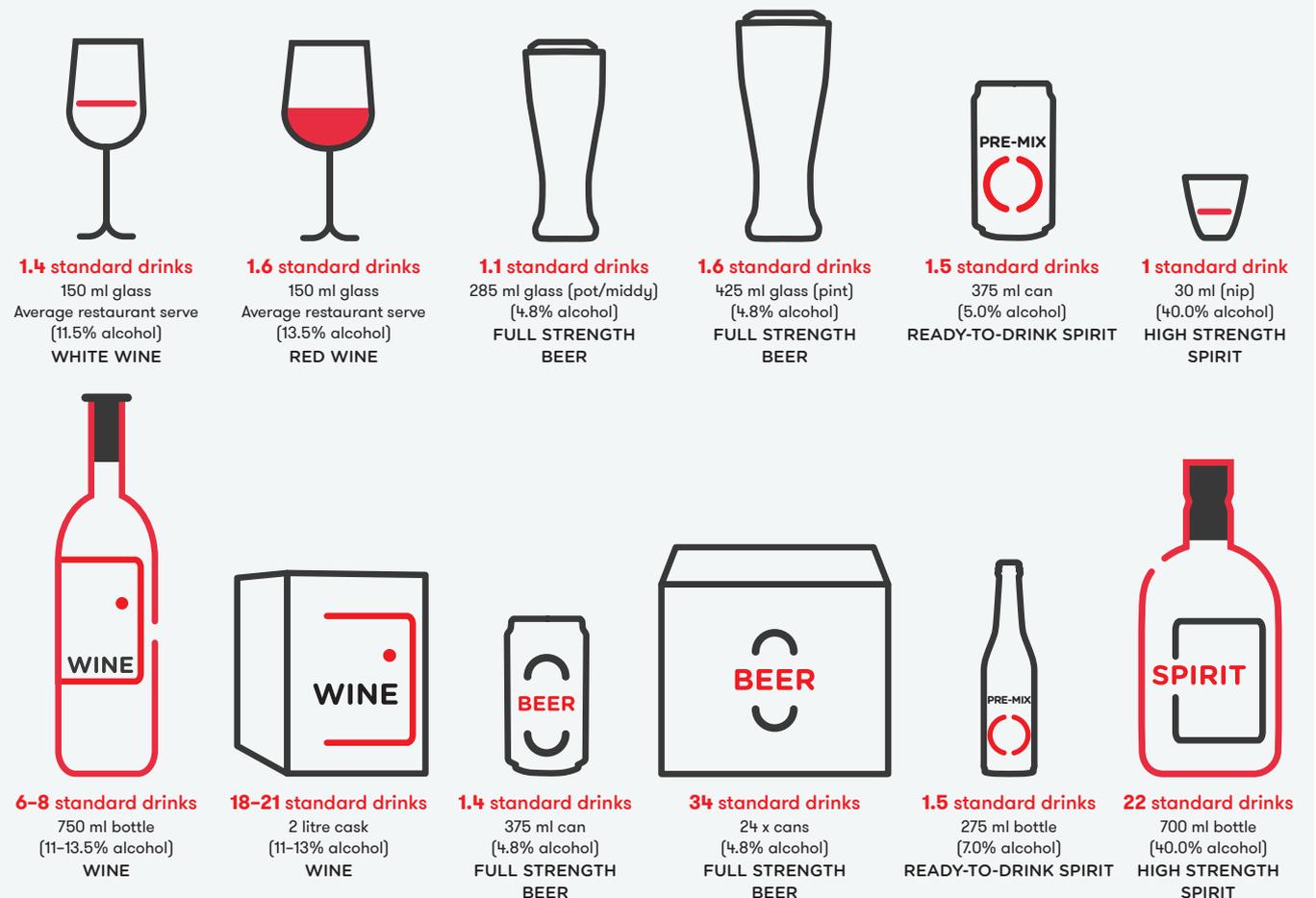
- Short-term harms, including hangovers, headaches, nausea, shakiness and possibly vomiting and memory loss. There is also the risk of alcohol poisoning which can cause death.
- Behaviour-based risks, including falls, assaults, car accidents, shame and embarrassment, loss of valuable items, and financial losses through reckless spending while intoxicated, or loss of income through time off work.

- Alcohol can also continue to affect you the following day. Hangovers can significantly increase lapses in attention and can impair your ability to work or drive.
- Long-term harms, including becoming dependent on alcohol, and developing liver cancer or brain damage.
- Binge drinking may result in blackouts, where a person may say or do things after heavy drinking and not remember these events¹.

A common misconception is that a marker on a glass of wine indicates one standard drink, but this is not necessarily the case as glass sizes and the concentration of alcohol in different wines can vary.

What is a standard drink?

A standard drink contains 10 grams of pure alcohol. Alcoholic drinks often contain more than one standard drink, e.g. a schooner of full strength beer is 1.6 standard drinks. Use the picture below as a guide. If you're unsure how many standard drinks your drink contains, check on the label. If you're at someone's house, pour your own drinks so you can keep track.



Some tips for low-risk drinking

- **Set limits for yourself and stick to them.** Don't let other people pressure you into drinking more than you want.
- **Quench your thirst first.** Have a non-alcoholic drink first if you are thirsty.
- **Drink slowly.** Take sips, not gulps.
- **Drink from a small glass.** Some wine glasses can hold several standard drinks.
- **Be aware of exactly what you are drinking.** Remember that 'alcopops' (ready-to-drink or pre-mixed spirits or wine) can be quite strong, even though they don't taste like strong alcohol.
- **Try a low-alcohol or non-alcoholic alternative.**
- **Eat before and while drinking,** but avoid salty snacks, which can make you thirsty.
- **Avoid getting into 'rounds' or 'shouts'.** They are likely to make you drink more than you would otherwise.
- **Avoid 'top ups'.** Drink one drink at a time so it's easier to keep track of how much you are drinking.
- **Stay busy.** Don't just sit and drink. Dancing, games or playing music can take the focus away from drinking.

How to avoid alcohol-related harms

While there is no safe level of drinking, the National Health and Medical Research Council recommends adults drink no more than two standard drinks on any day to reduce the risk of long term injury or disease (such as cancer)². They also recommend no more than four standard drinks on any one occasion to reduce the risk of immediate harm or injury (such as falling over)².

Not drinking is the safest option for anyone under 18 years of age, pregnant or breastfeeding women, and women who are planning a pregnancy².

If you're worried about your drinking, see your doctor or call DrugInfo on 1300 85 85 84 for free confidential information and advice.

References

1. National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC). (2009). *Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol*. Canberra: NHMRC.
2. White, A. M. (2003). *What happened? Alcohol, Memory Blackouts, and the Brain*. Retrieved May 1, 2018, from National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism: pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/arh27-2/186-196.htm?icid%5Bmaster%5D=vid~c711a795-bf14-4ebe-b008-3e771db6dd80&icid%5Bil726%5D=rlt-1423017212~land~2_4757_direct_

● Support Services

DrugInfo • 1800 85 85 84

ADF's free, confidential phone service, providing information and referral for alcohol and other drugs.

DirectLine • 1800 888 236

Free, confidential service offering over the phone counselling, support and referral (24 hours, 7 days a week).

ADF Help and Support Services Directory • adf.org.au/help-support/support-services-directory



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